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A CASE STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE "STUDENT FEEDBACK ON INSTRUCTION" PROCESS AT A TECHNICAL INSTITUTE IN WESTERN CANADA

BY

CLAUDINE CORBETT-LOURENÇO ©

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

ADMINISTRATION OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1995

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DEGREE: Master of Education

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1995

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DATE: Oct 3, 1995

THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO MY SISTER

RONALDA ANNE CORBETT-GUENETTE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the period of this research, I was fortunate to have had the support of such interesting, insightful and challenging professors as Dr. Joe da Costa and Dr. Mike Andrews. Joe is to be commended for his role as my advisor; his thorough questioning and detailed technical analysis kept me continually challenged. Mike ensured the focus of my research was foremost in my mind as I progressed through each stage of the process. They made the entire experience more relevant and memorable than I would have thought possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Jim Small for his assistance during the initial stages of this work and Dr. Doherty-Poirier for her valued feedback as my external examiner.

I would like to thank the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology for its financial support during my education leave. Also, to the many individuals at NAIT who showed ongoing interest in my progress; to them, I extend my thanks.

Encouragement and interest from my family was important during the time of this research. My sons, Josè and James, kept their personal demands at a minimum so their mother could work. My husband, Josè, supported and encouraged my decision to undertake this challenge. I thank them for the adjustments they made in their lives for me. And finally, I would like to thank my parents for instilling in me the desire to be independent, to take on challenges, and to enjoy each day.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the student feedback on instruction process at a technical institute. The case method was used to address the research question. Data gathering consisted of interviews with instructors and program supervisors; surveys were undertaken with students and instructors. Data was analysed according the following themes: (a) purpose, (b) process, (c) utility, (d) culture and, (e) accountability.

The findings were related to questions on policies, processes, and outcomes. These were examined against the perceived satisfaction levels of the main stakeholder groups. The findings suggest that fundamental changes would need to occur if the primary purpose of the student feedback process remains one of ensuring that instructional improvement goals are optimized. The absence of a feedback loop, the minimal amount of educational opportunities undertaken by instructors based on the feedback results, and the varying ways the process is administered, all undermine the effectiveness of the process.

Implications for practice were identified; it is suggested that the present system be analysed in view of these findings. Several concepts for individuals who wish to pursue further research related to student feedback on instruction were presented.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In May 1992, an institute of technology in Western Canada (the Institute) undertook a quality improvement initiative, Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). This management philosophy was adopted to respond to the reality of reduced government funding and to the question of accountability to taxpayers. A basic premise of CQI is the examination and evaluation of all processes in an organization. CQI relies heavily on gathering data and assessing and interpreting those data to improve performance and ultimately provide efficiencies to the organization. CQI goals were identified that related to the Institute's customers, specifically its students, staff, and employers.

The primary customer of the Institute is the student. The main product of the Institute is programs. The main product of the programs is curriculum instruction. The main method of instructional evaluation is the student feedback on instruction form (SFIF). Given the amount of human and financial resources inherent in this activity at the Institute, it has been questioned whether this activity facilitates or hinders instructors to meet or exceed expectations with respect to quality of instruction. It is difficult to discern if the data gathered from the SFIF provide relevant, timely, and useful formative information for instructors. Constructs, then, need to be identified and measured to determine the utility of the tool for instructors. Benchmarks need to be established and used for determining not only success (which is subjective in nature) but also for ensuring that "continuous quality improvement" becomes the norm in the instructional process. What needs examination is whether or not one is operating in a CQI environment if each process in that environment is not part of the continuous improvement cycle.

Background

Conception of the Process

At the request of the Institute's Board of Governors (November 1985) and under the direction of the Institute's Academic Council (April 1987), a formal process for collecting student feedback on instruction data was implemented in May of 1988. There were two primary objectives; first, the feedback was to provide one source of information into an instructor's total performance (summative purpose) and second, to provide feedback to instructors for self-improvement (formative purpose). There was considerable concern expressed by the instructional staff regarding the first objective, particularly students' ability to evaluate instructors on some aspects of their role other than instruction. As well, instructors expressed concern regarding the inclusion of subjective questions that they felt went beyond the students' perceptions of an instructor's behavior.

After an initial review of the process in 1990, it was decided that the student feedback on instruction data not be used for summative purposes. Due to the negative feedback received from instructional staff, as mentioned previously, a revised model ensured that student feedback would not be used for purposes of appraising performance unless the feedback was specifically sought for that purpose. Those circumstances where specific feedback is requested by the instructor's supervisor were noted in the implementation guidelines. Included in the guidelines were those situations where: (a) the supervisor received a formal complaint from students, or (b) the supervisor perceived there is a problem with the quality of instruction. It is only at that point that the supervisor decides whether or not to initiate the collection of student feedback data. This process is known as "supervisor-initiated feedback." It is a requirement that those feedback forms be signed by the students to validate their comments. That feedback then goes to both the instructor and the supervisor. The feedback may then become part of the instructor's performance assessment. That extended process, supervisor-initiated feedback, is not part of this research; this information is provided for contextual purposes only.

The second objective noted in the original process (to provide formative feedback to the instructor for instructional improvement) is now the primary purpose of the present feedback on instruction process. This student feedback process is initiated by the instructor. Students are not required to sign the instrument but are encouraged to provide comments. The confidential feedback report is generated by the data processing personnel and returned to the instructor only. The instructor then interprets the student feedback results and decides how to use them. Unless an instructor notifies a supervisor that he or she is: (a) pursuing professional development activities, (b) making changes in a course based on the feedback, or (c) sharing either positive or negative feedback results in some way with the students who provided the feedback and/or their program supervisor, it is not known by the program supervisor or the students if the feedback was beneficial to the instructor, or indeed, if any changes occurred because of it.

As a checkpoint, the program supervisor receives a list of instructors' names who have completed the feedback by course and semester. If the feedback is not completed as required, then noncompliance may become a performance issue. That decision is made by the program supervisor in consultation with the instructor.

In 1990, a third objective was added. The data collected would be used to provide longitudinal information on the quality of instruction by program and division within the Institute. This would allow supervisors and administration, once institute norms were established, to assess variances to those norms and also to monitor any emerging trends. These reports were generated annually and provided to the respective academic divisions, programs and administration. The main intent of these reports was to have this information shared with instructional staff although no mechanism was ever instituted to ensure that this is done.

In December 1994, the Institute's Academic Council passed a motion to have these reports produced only periodically. The main concerns surrounding continued production of these reports were that: (a) the resources involved in creating them were great, and (b) the utility of the information to the programs and divisions was not particularly useful. The original intent of providing longitudinal assessment is still possible.

Present Process

Presently the student feedback on instruction process as noted in the 1993/94 implementation guidelines, states that each instructor must complete a minimum of one SFIF for a course of their choice in each academic semester. A standard student feedback questionnaire is used to collect the data to ensure that consistent information is gathered by which valid longitudinal statistics can be produced. The option of customizing the form when instructors are seeking specific feedback on their instruction, or on any factor related to their course, is available using questions from a student feedback on instruction questionbank. The instructor and the program supervisor, decides which group of students to evaluate.

Obtaining formative feedback with the intent that instructional improvement goals are optimized, is the main purpose of the current feedback process. The student feedback form requests that feedback be provided to the instructors on observed instructional behaviours and the classroom climate. A secondary purpose is to provide statistical information to the Institute on the quality of instruction on an institute-wide basis. Although the reports are no longer provided yearly, there remains the ability to generate requested reports periodically. The data gathered from the present process is not used for any purpose associated with an instructor's performance assessment. Feedback for summative purposes is sought only in those situations where someone, usually students or a supervisor, initiate the feedback process. It appears to be the desire of the student representatives on the Academic Council that this feedback be used for instructor performance review purposes. This can only occur if the feedback is initiated by the program supervisor. The item is presently under examination by the Institute's Academic Council.

Within the 1993/94 guidelines there exists a process for delivering the SFIF to the students. The implementation of the process should not vary from program to program. That part of the process is not currently monitored so variations to the implementation guidelines are possible. Instructors are not required to share the results of the feedback with either administrators or students; some choose to do so. Due to the CQI movement within the Institute, some instructors are piloting other methods of gathering feedback on instruction in addition to the formal requirement of completing one SFIF per semester.

Statement of the Problem

After reviewing how the process was conceptualized, the stages of development and the present process, the statement of the problem emerged. "Is the student feedback on instruction process, particularly the SFIF, at the Institute effective in assuring that instructional improvement goals are optimized?" It is not sufficient in a CQI environment to assume that quality in instruction is automatic; as with other processes, it needs to be evaluated as objectively and consistently as possible. This is to ensure that areas for improvement are identified and that any instructional behavioral concerns and issues associated with the classroom climate are addressed using the tools and supported by philosophies associated with CQI. In addition, the goal of the Institute related to quality instruction must be met to provide instructors with valid information for them to react to. There are internal issues that the Institute is coming to terms with in an ever changing postsecondary environment.

The issue needs to be examined externally as well. The provincial government's advanced education department is in the process of developing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in an effort to provide benchmarks for institutions within the province's postsecondary system to equitably compare themselves. One KPI that is being discussed for evaluation is learning outcomes as they relate to system inputs such as the ratio of the operating grant to instructional hours. In terms of accountability, the major portion of an institute's resources is used for the delivery of courses. Since instruction is the main input variable in that process, it is incumbent upon administrators of the Institute to be responsive to the question of accountability by assuring the affected stakeholders that quality of instruction is being evaluated and assessed on an ongoing basis.

Other evaluation techniques are used by some instructors to evaluate their pedagogy but this is not done on an institute-wide basis. Many variables are involved in the evaluation of instruction and those variables cannot be easily captured using any one tool. Exploration of other questions that arise from the research question include:

1. What are the policies and processes by means of which the SFIF is prepared and administered to students?
2. What are the policies and processes by means of which the SFIF data are:
    a. made available to stakeholder groups?
    b. acted upon for the improvement of instruction?
    c. acted upon for administrative purposes?
3. What are the outcomes of the student feedback on instruction practices as perceived by the stakeholder groups?
4. What are the perceived satisfaction levels of stakeholder groups with the policies, processes, outcomes, and with the SFIF as a tool?
5. What are the recommendations of the stakeholder groups for the improvement of the SFIF and related

processes for the evaluation and improvement of instruction?

Prior to deciding to investigate this question, it was suspected that since student feedback on instruction is a requirement, it was seen by faculty members as an administrative tool and not as a quality vehicle for the improvement of their pedagogy. It was also suspected that other methods of instructor evaluation, particularly in programs which are integrating CQI evaluation tools, are used minimally throughout the institute and within programs so that broad-based quality changes in instruction do not take place. Although the success of any evaluation program is to have some form of professional development process in place to support the analysis and interpretation of data, there are minimal resources available which can be utilized by instructors who search out assistance for interpretation and analysis of the feedback results.

Significance of the Problem

The research question asks if the student feedback on instruction process at the Institute, particularly the SFIF, is effective in assuring that instructional improvement goals are optimized. The desired intention is to integrate the recommendations from the research findings into the instructional process at the Institute, which could ultimately result in improvements to the teaching environment. Provision of a non-threatening process would allow for the development of instructional expertise by focusing on methods to improve instruction and thereby benefit all instructional stakeholders.

It is anticipated that the research will broaden the framework which supports a role for CQI in the instructional process at the Institute. The intention would be to have some value added to the process, to make the process more comprehensive, and ultimately to implement recommendations and invite further analysis of the process in a continuous CQI cycle of planning, implementing, evaluating, adapting, and improving. The contribution to practice would be improvement to any process that:

1. stresses what is ultimately delivered to the student has only positive outcomes and which bodes well for all stakeholders;
2. structures the teaching environment to allow instructors to concentrate on the development of students which is the primary focus of the institution;
3. ensures a non-threatening environment for the development of instructional expertise which will improve relationships throughout programs and divisions;

4. focuses on ensuring to the stakeholders that quality actually exists which will allow the institution to be responsive to the public's demand for accountability.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

Due to appropriateness of responses expected from individuals who are very familiar with the process, this research was delimited to a sample of the following individuals in a two-year technical institute:

1. second-year students;
2. instructors who have been teaching at the Institute for a minimum of three years; and,
3. program supervisors, associated with four academic divisions of the Institute.

A decision was made to complete the research during the semester running from January to April 1995. At that point, the majority of second-year students would have been required to complete a student feedback form during one or all of their previous three semesters. This guaranteed a greater range of experience on the part of the students with completing the forms which was important to the researcher. There was the possibility that a student may not have yet completed a feedback form for various reasons. It was anticipated that this would apply to a minimal number of students in the January to April semester.

Similar reasoning (having a greater range of experience) was used to ensure that the instructor sample had a minimum of three years of teaching experience. This ensured that they would have sought student feedback enough times to deliberate and provide reflective assessment to the researcher on the topic. Program supervisors were included in the research since they do have a role in the student feedback process although they are not formally included in the feedback loop. Supervisors are only involved when they are: (a) working with the instructor to choose which class to solicit feedback from, (b) invited by an instructor to review the student feedback results, and (c) requested to do a supervisor-initiated feedback on instruction.

Due to these delimitations, generalizability to other than two-year postsecondary technical institutions of similar diversity should be made with caution.

Limitations

The following are possible limitations of this study:

1. The ability to ensure quality interviews with the instructors and program supervisors during the time period suggested. Any activity not related to the

academic process may be treated as secondary to it, particularly for the program supervisors.

2. Each division within the Institute is very unique and this diversity may provide too broad a spectrum of responses which could hamper or cloud the interpretation of the data.
3. There may be potential for withholding information from the researcher because of a peer relationship with the researcher, both for program supervisors and instructors.
4. There may be the possibility that the researcher could be influenced by experiences as a program supervisor when creating the interview questions and interpreting the responses. It was anticipated that the pilot study would limit that potential bias.

Definitions of Terms

After completing the literature review, it became apparent that student feedback, faculty evaluation, and students' ratings were used interchangeably in the majority of research, as they will be in this thesis. Also, the terms assessment and evaluation are used synonymously.

In order to ensure clarity of the terms used throughout this thesis, the following definitions are provided to define the context of the research.

Accountability refers to being answerable for results and demonstrating that what is delivered within the postsecondary system is of high quality, efficient and effective. It also refers to the ability to innovate and respond to those it serves, and being prepared to examine the way in which it is organized and operates.

Continuous Quality Improvement refers to a systematic process that assesses, monitors and adapts operations and services in an effort to meet or exceed customers' expectations. This term recognizes that quality already exists; hence the usage and the importance of the word "continuous."

Culture refer to the shared beliefs, expectations, and values held by members of the organization which develop over time, resulting in a shared view and collective agreement on the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to problems of external adaptation and internal integration. Eventually, culture evolves into an intrinsic, subtle phenomenon, essentially disappearing from the realm of explicit awareness. (Schein, 1985, p 188).

Effective refers to the extent to which the goals and objectives of processes within the institution are achieved.

Feedback is the information provided to instructors about performance that includes recommendations for future improvement. The focus is on the instructor, not on the outcomes. (Gil, 1987, p 58)

Key Performance Indicators are either qualitative or quantitative accountability measures that address inputs, processes, and outputs. Their purpose is to enable an institution to monitor its performance over time, to assess if it is meeting its objectives, and to allow for an institution to measure itself against other comparable institutions.

Process refers to a set of interrelated work activities characterized by a set of specific inputs and value-added tasks that produce a set of specific outputs - they incorporate people, equipment, energy, procedures, and materials.

Stakeholders are individuals (instructor, student or supervisor), the Institute's administration and employers, who either have an affect on the student feedback on instruction process or are affected by it.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one has presented an introduction to the research and focused on the background issues associated with the research problem as stated. Also, the significance of the research, the contextual terms and definitions, were provided. The definitions provide for clarity and consistency throughout the research and the subsequent analysis provided in Chapter four. For the same reason, limitations and delimitations associated with the research were addressed as well.

Chapter two reviews pertinent research and literature related to the study. Part of the literature review was completed prior to finalizing the research question and gathering the data. An additional review of the literature became important throughout the data analysis portion of the research as significant themes emerged. In chapter three, the research design method is described including information on the development of the survey instruments for students and instructors. Development of the interview schedule for instructors and program supervisors used in the pilot study, is also discussed. A detailed description of how the data were analysed is presented and a summarized overview of the themes used to make sense of the data described.

Chapter four provides an analysis of the findings based on the framework described in Chapter 3. Included is a summary of the research results. To conclude the thesis, Chapter five presents the summary of the research, conclusions drawn from the research, and recommendations for future practice and theory.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter examines literature related to the research problem. It focuses specifically on: (a) the historical context, (b) the myths associated with student feedback, (c) the processes to administer and manage the student feedback programs, (d) the perceived utility of such programs, (e) the influence of an institution's culture on a student feedback program, and (f) the emerging accountability and quality issues affecting postsecondary education.

Student evaluation of instruction has received considerable attention from researchers since the 60s. There is a wealth of information that one must systematically examine in an effort to capture the essence of the research. It was quite evident throughout the literature reviewed that through time, different forces, both political and economic, drove (and continue to drive) the evaluation movement. Viewing this through a historical framework allows one to understand and assess how student evaluation of instruction evolved from a uni-dimensional process to a multi-dimensional one. The focus has shifted from simply providing feedback on instruction for the benefit of the student to becoming one component of many that now comprise overall institutional evaluation.

Five relevant themes emerged from the review. The first theme dealt with the myths that surround student evaluation of instruction. Much of the literature, whether early writing or more recent research, described effective processes for a successful student feedback program. This emerged early in the review as most researchers were, in essence, researching a process. The feedback process is dealt with comprehensively in Chapters four and five, since most of the literature discusses specific characteristics of effective evaluation systems and much of the data analysis addresses process issues.

The ongoing changing dynamics involving students, faculty, institutions and government are commonly reflected in the broader institutional perspective which now encompasses various assessment instruments. Overlapping the process theme was a third theme, the utility or value associated with the student feedback on instruction process. This topic appeared in recent literature usually directly related to professional development activities of an institution.

The fourth theme embedded in the more recent literature was the effect institutional culture has on the majority of processes in an institution, with student evaluation of instruction as one of those processes. A student feedback program will be directly affected and certainly driven by an institution's culture. A fifth theme emerged, that of accountability within postsecondary institutions. Issues of quality and performance indicators were reviewed as part of the accountability theme.

Theall and Franklin (1990), provided the following assessment which captures the essence of these programs.

> Student ratings "systems" are made up of more than questionnaires, machine-scorable answer sheets, and computer-generated reports of results. Regardless of the qualifications of their users, ratings systems are complex aggregations of functional components and processes that act together to collect, analyze, report or help users employ students' perceptions of the instructions they have received. Such aggregations may be chaotic and poorly articulated, or they may be "default" systems churning out incoherent noise. Conversely, they may be systematically planned and implemented to provide valid, useful information. They are never simple, although they are often treated simplistically. (p 19)

Historical Context

Some form of instructor evaluation has been in use in higher education since the turn of the century. The first published rating scale was the Purdue Rating Scale of Instruction in 1926 (Cook, 1989). It was not until the student movement of the late 50s and early 60s that evaluation of instruction became a vehicle used in the administration of higher education to not only evaluate instructional effectiveness uses but to provide input into the total performance assessment of faculty within institutions.

During the 60s, evaluation was driven by the rapid growth of postsecondary institutions. With this growth also came increasing enrolments and students seeing themselves as consumers (Centra, 1993). Students used course evaluations to choose instructors and courses; as well, many instructors used the evaluations as a method to improve their pedagogy. Student governments were instrumental in ensuring that institutions brought in such programs. Early student rating questionnaires were funded by student governments. There were many inherent problems with the early programs. Some problems were resource based. Another common problem was the change of focus of successive student governments away from evaluation of instruction and on to other issues more pressing to the student government of the day (Arreolo, 1987). This often left the institution to manage the student feedback process. Minimal research on evaluation was undertaken during this period but the groundwork was laid and the area became ripe for study. The focus was on evaluation as opposed to feedback.

The literature supports (Centra, 1987; Marsh, 1987) the above contention that evaluation was the primary focus of early assessment programs and that these programs were not comprehensive in their purpose nor were they part of an instructional system. They were oftentimes haphazardly put together with minimal consideration for how that process would integrate with other systems within an institution.

During the 70s considerable research on student evaluations was undertaken (Centra, 1993). Many studies tested the bias, validity and utility of the evaluation instruments (Cohen, 1990; Franklin & Theall, 1990; Ory, 1990; Aleamoni, 1987; Marsh, 1987). Evaluation, as Braskamp (1984), concluded, was accepted as the

> planning, collecting, analyzing, synthesizing, and using information to fulfil one or more purposes. fundamentally a process - a practical, social, political, subjective and human undertaking as well as a technical, analytical procedure. (p. 86)

It was during this period that student evaluation of instruction was used in both formative (improving instruction) and summative (used in making personnel decisions) manners. For much of the research undertaken during this period, it was sufficient to take a careful and detailed approach to analyzing the complexity of the rating tools, testing their validity and trying to qualify and quantify the essence of what was being rated. Criteria for evaluation centred around what made classroom instruction effective and what characteristics were associated with good teaching. The design of the assessment vehicle to capture that information was continuously under critical examination (Braskamp, 1994).

During the 80s, drastic changes occurred. Government reduction in funding was most notable, which necessitated a greater need for institutions to become more accountable. Student demand for quality instruction increased due to requirements by industry for highly qualified human resources. Competition for scarce resources within higher education itself was also prevalent. Drawing conclusions from research about the effectiveness of evaluation became important.

A meta-analysis by Cohen (1990) provided the following general conclusions about student evaluation of instruction:

1. overall course and instructor ratings...are related to students' achievement (Cohen, 1981; Cohen, 1986; d'Apollonia & Abrami, 1988);

2. feedback by itself contributes only modestly to improvement but when used in conjunction with a consultant, leads to greater improvement (Cohen, 1980; L'Hommediew, Menges, & Brinko, 1988);
3. instructor's expressiveness has a substantial impact on ratings but not on achievement; lecture content has a substantial affect on achievement but not on ratings. (Abrami, Leventhal, & Perry, 1992, p. 127).

These types of conclusions gave administrators substance to support personnel decisions. The era of summative evaluation had arrived (Theall & Franklin, 1990). Based on Cohen's research three main purposes of student feedback were concluded: (a) to aid in administrative decisions, (b) to aid in course or instructor selection, and (c) to provide feedback for instructional purposes. The intent of the first two were summative in nature; with respect to the third purpose, research showed that student feedback was inconsistent in producing instructional improvement.

Subsequent analysis of Cohen's early findings (1980, 1981, 1987), research by Feldman (1989) cautioned that Cohen's research included only studies which met specific criteria. He stated that additional research needed to be examined before making broad-based recommendations. Cohen's studies ensured that: (a) the data analysed were from actual classes, (b) the unit of analysis was the class or instructor and not the individual student, and (c) the data needed to come from a multi-section course with a common achievement measure so that a rating/achievement correlation could be determined. Given the added value that Cohen's synthesized, integrated research provided to the understanding of student evaluation, even Feldman used this much-cited research identified in Cohen's meta-analysis to provide the basis for his own research on student ratings and achievement.

In keeping with these thoughts, Theall and Franklin's (1990) research on the potential of student rating systems quoted an anonymous response from a survey they conducted on student rating systems:

> Student "evaluations" are a corrupt practice of the '60s, one of the many from that era that I hope will be completely forgotten. They are an easy sop to the students from administrators ...who are unwilling or unable to do anything to really improve teaching...I happen to think that there are some really rotten teachers ....who should be forced to shape up or leave. But that's a job for strong deans and chairmen [sic], not student "evaluators" and educationists like yourself. (p. 17)

A very harsh assessment, it would seem, although Centra (1987) stated that feedback from student evaluation in isolation plays a minimal role in the improvement of teaching. This is discussed further during examination of the utility of feedback systems.

Stevens (1987) supported Cohen and noted that many factors are involved in providing feedback, not the least of which is "the instructor's cognitive state--motivation, attitude and knowledge--are directly responsible for the manner in which evaluative information is received and, once received, for the manner in which it is applied or ignored" (p 37). He concluded from his research that feedback from students is critical but only one component of a larger evaluation system that should be in place if the goal is instructional improvement. He proposed a model for instructional change which goes through a cycle of (a) *evaluation* using a feedback instrument, (b) *identification* of any concerns regarding instructional delivery, (c) *design* of a plan to address the concerns, and finally, (d) *implementation* of the plan. What Stevens purported is that if a student feedback system only collects the feedback but does not provide the necessary resources to allow individuals to analyse and interpret the data, such as through peer consultation, so an action plan can be designed and implemented, then it is not possible for instructional improvement to occur. He concluded that evaluation is only one part in the improvement cycle.

This model is both supported and refuted in the literature. One study which questioned Stevens' conclusions was completed by Hohem and Glasman (1979). Stevens included their review in his 1987 research. They concluded that "feedback from students ratings...does not seem to be effective for the purpose of improving performance of...teachers" (p 33).

Using the student feedback tool in isolation was also addressed conceptually by Stevens (1987) and Menges (1991) who recommended that the analysis and interpretation be done by an evaluation professional in conjunction with the instructor. From his 1987 research, Stevens concluded that this approach substantially increased the utility associated with the analysis and interpretation of the evaluation. This further substantiated Steven's work and was supported by Seldin (1990), Cohen (1990), Brinko (1991), Geis (1991), Lewis (1991) and Centra (1993). This is the most substantial recent advancement in student evaluation research.

The period of research from the late 1980s onwards accepts as valid many of the earlier findings and extended evaluation to include peer and alumni evaluation. Although much research has been undertaken on the comparison between student and alumni evaluations, the results indicate that there is little variance. The suggestion is present that current students rate an instructor more favorably than do former students.

Doyle, who examined this issue in 1975, stated that this could be attributed, rightly or wrongly, to an instructor improving over time. A broad assumption, but one which was mentioned in other literature as well. Doyle went on to state that if student feedback is used for instructional improvement, it must be continuous overtime to reveal patterns of change. He believed this to be important for both new instructors and to those who are experienced. If change is not monitored in this way, it is difficult to determine if the process of student evaluation is effective. He further stated that visibility of the system will increase its credibility within an institution.

One could conclude from the various studies that the results of student ratings are reliable and unbiased but only for the areas assessed. The tool should not be used in isolation as it provides a limited perspective on the quality of instruction. Other questions arise. As Centra (1987) noted, modest changes or improvements occurred when ratings were used for the first time but very little research supports that improvements occur when they are used continually. These findings are in conflict with Doyle's 1975 research just discussed. What this raises is the question of the utility associated with this process which is addressed later in this chapter.

Marsh (1987) concurred with McKeachie (1979) and Centra (1989) when he summarized the research into a comprehensive listing of characteristics which provide a framework for understanding the primary purpose of student feedback. Some of those key characteristics suggest that: (a) they are, first and foremost, a function of the instructor who teaches a course rather than what is being taught, (b) they are considered valid as a means of assessing teaching and that given the biases, (c) they are seen as useful by students, faculty and administration. As Brinko stated in 1993, "Assessment designed to increase personal control rather than institutional control enhances "ownership" of the assessment process and is more apt to lead to subsequent changes in behavior" (p 61).

It may seem as though the student feedback process has come full circle. Arreola (1987) stated that student input is related to instructional delivery and instructional design should be sought as a component of a faculty evaluation program.

> ....the value of student input is largely dependent on how credible it is with both the faculty and administration....the quality of student input, on which credibility is based,

> is a function not only of the reliability and appropriateness of the questionnaires or rating forms used to gather that input but also of the degree to which students believe that their input will count. (p. 43)

He spoke of joint credibility between students and faculty if there is to be continued validity of student ratings and strongly applauded any institution which provided ongoing education to each new student government for the purpose of their institution's student feedback program. As Centra (1993) pointed out, students and student governments which were instrumental in ensuring that institutions brought in such programs in an exercise to assist students in choosing courses and instructors, now need to ensure that credibility for any student feedback program is not the sole responsibility of any one individual, group or institution, but a shared responsibility of the stakeholders.

Evaluation of instruction has certainly evolved in the past 50 years and while an analysis of its development provides a structural base for its many uses, both formative and summative, critical issues remain. As Centra (1989) noted, the external pressures of budget restraints, low enrollment growth, and pressure from the many stakeholders in postsecondary education, student feedback on instruction is one process that will assist in the improvement of quality in instruction.

Myths

Early research produced conflicting findings about student ratings. Myths, which are based on some facts or truths, began to emerge, as identified by Aleamoni (1987) and also by Cohen (1990). As more studies were completed and methodology improved, this was lessened. The belief on the part of faculty and administrators in many of the myths that surround evaluation is one theme that is becoming predominant in research but is not often labelled as such.

Cohen (1990) summarized the most common myths associated with student feedback. The research findings by Braskamp, Brandenbury and Ory (1984) and Marsh (1987) negate all or parts of the myths by providing research-supported counter arguments. These myths and counter arguments are summarized in Table 1.

Cohen did not dismiss the fact that many of these myths are based on some facts but cautions people to distinguish between reality and myth -- without distinguishing between myths and reality, student feedback programs will be severely hampered and provide minimal value. As Seldin (1990) stated "... the ultimate goal of classroom research is to make teaching more productive -- to close the gap between what is taught and what is learned" (p. 205). As classroom research

Table 1

Myths and Counter Arguments Associated with Students Providing Feedback on Instruction

Myth	Counter Argument
Students are not qualified to make judgements about teaching competence.	*Students are qualified to rate certain dimensions of teaching.*
Student ratings are popularity contests.	*Students do not judge instructors on popularity alone.*
Former students are not able to make accurate judgements after a few years of leaving.	*Current student ratings are highly correlated with alumni ratings.*
Student ratings are unreliable.	*They are reliable in terms of stability (student rating same course and instructor at two points in time) and agreement (similarity of students rating a course and instructor).*
Student ratings are invalid.	*They are valid as measured against a number of criteria which includes students' learning.*
Students rate instructors based on the grades they receive.	*They are not influenced either by grades they receive or expect to receive.*
Extraneous variables and conditions affect student ratings.	*They are not inordinately affected by student, course or instructor characteristics.*
Students rate difficult, high-workload courses lower than less onerous, low workload courses.	*Depending on the type of program; high workload courses are rated higher than low-workload courses.*

it is imperative that myths be eliminated if the ultimate goals are to be achieved.

Supporting these myths, are often individuals within institutions. Centra (1987) identified five factions within an institution that may affect the successful implementation of any type of faculty evaluation system. They are:

1. Purists -- these individuals place value only on that information that can be quantified and measured with precision.
2. Utopians -- the process must meet perfection or they find the entire system worthless. They invariably find fault with some or all of any system.
3. Saboteurs -- they appear as supporters of the system, but are fault-finders constantly looking for refinement.
4. Naive -- these individuals will adopt any system without thinking through the implications.
5. Realists -- these individuals realize that any system is better than not having one in place; they realize the need for ongoing modification.

Centra points out that the focus becomes one of understanding the evaluation process and educating those most affected by it.

For many, myths are reality; it becomes the work of whomever is responsible for the evaluation system to understand the motivation of individuals within their institutions and what supportive or detractive effect that will have on the overall evaluation process and ultimately the teaching environment.

Utility

Centra (1987) states that the value of the feedback reaches a point where there is minimal useful formative information to an instructor. He supported this citing research completed by Miller (1971), Braunstein, Klein, and Pachla (1973), Centra (1973), and Aleamoni (1978). He purported that since their utility with respect to formative impact may indeed reduce overtime, "... that the ratings are then used only for personnel decisions, if at all" (p. 49).

Cohen's (1990) meta-analysis had indicated that student feedback alone allowed for a modest increase in instructional improvement; but, if it was combined with consultation on what the feedback results meant, then the value of the feedback increased and instructors were able to maintain high student feedback results. This echoed Stevens' work. Brinko (1991) however, cautioned about blindly accepting such generalities drawn from research stating that the research cited by the Cohen meta-analysis is not prescriptive and does not fully describe the type of consultation nor interaction that must occur before it can be stated that consultations improve the effectiveness of student feedback results. She goes on to suggest there is no single type of interaction that is more effective than another but it depends on the individuals involved. It is the actual interaction between the consultant and the instructor that is the determinant in the value of this process. Trust and rapport are key factors for successful consultation.

Lewis (1991) also addressed the value of student feedback if interpreted by the instructor with a consultant. In her work in the area of improving teaching, she cited three advantages that McKeachie identified by collaborating with a consultant:

> First, he or she [the consultant] can help identify particularly important information provided in the data, separating critical information from superficial information. Second, the consultant can provide hope and encouragement. All too often feedback fails because it discourages the individual and increases his or her sense of anxiety and hopelessness. And third, a consultant can provide suggestions about what to do about the data, for example, suggestions about alternative methods of teaching that may be more productive than those used in the past. (p.66)

Balancing the research on the use of a consultant to improve the utility of the feedback would suggest that using a process which is inclusive of some type of feedback loop, the use of a consultant would, for example, marginally enhance the value of the feedback for instructional improvement.

Looking at student feedback on instruction within the broader context of institutional effectiveness, Arreola (1983) stated that

> Only when faculty realize that obtaining the rewards their profession and institution has to offer is the function of their performance and thus under their control, and that the faculty evaluation and development program is a valuable tool in helping them both identify and overcome the obstacle standing between them and these rewards, will the program have a chance for success. (p. 92)

Interestingly, student feedback on instruction is part of many faculty evaluation systems, but as Andrews (1985) emphasized in his research on evaluation for instructional excellence, that both student and peer evaluation are self-serving and "...such evaluation systems may be less threatening and easier to administer for both faculty and administrators, they have not proven to provide a *guarantee* of quality in instruction" (p. 159).

Andrew's research strongly suggested that if an instructor is incompetent in the classroom, seldom would the student evaluation system document that reality which could possibly allow for instructional improvement to take place nor would it ultimately provide the information that would be necessary for removal of the incompetent instructor. As part of a comprehensive system that included in-class evaluation, peer evaluation, et cetera, student feedback as one component in an integrated system would then provide more value to the instructional process.

Culture

Today, student evaluation of instruction is firmly established in many institutions. Current research extends beyond evaluation methodology to the interrelationship between the evaluation procedures and the way evaluation results are presented, interpreted and ultimately used by faculty and administrators. Theall (1990) noted that course ratings are actually systems in the context of a larger system: the institution. Institutional culture is the second theme identified in the review. What are the institutions goals with respect to evaluation? Knowing the answer to this question determines the design and purpose of the evaluation vehicles and also how those data affect the decision making about institutional goals. "Making good teaching an institutional priority requires changing values, behaviour and academic norms" (Seldin, 1990, p. 201). That statement is reflective of culture, which was discussed generally in the readings on student evaluation programs. What appears common in most research on organizational culture is, as Steers (1977) noted, that it: (a) is defined through the perception of the people in the organization, (b) influences these people through the management styles of its leaders, and (c) is what differentiates one institution from others that are similar in structure and/or mandate.

An extension to these thoughts can be found in Schein's (1985) descriptive definition of culture, which stated that the culture of an institution is comprised of shared values, beliefs, heroes, rituals, plus other characteristics. It is a

> ...shared view and collective agreement on the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to problems of external adaptation and internal integration....culture evolves into an intrinsic, subtle phenomenon, essentially disappearing from the realm of explicit awareness. (p. 188)

According to Bolman and Deal (1984), who conceptualized the use of strategic thought frames to evaluate organizations and the systems and processes within organizations, identified four organizational strategic frames: (a) the structural, (b) the human resource, (c) the political, and (d) symbolic thought frame. This model was based on organizational theory, particularly as it related to making sense of the motives, intentions and expectations of organization's people, their systems and processes. They suggest that evaluation serves a symbolic purpose. They indicated, by referring to their symbolic framework, that

> Evaluation is a ritual whose function is to calm the anxieties of the citizenry and to perpetuate the image of government rationality, efficiency, and accountability. The very act of requiring...evaluations may create the impression that government is seriously committed to the pursuit of publicly espoused goals such as increasing student achievement or reducing malnutrition. Evaluations lend credence to this image even when programs are created to appease interest groups. (p. 179)

Although written a decade ago, the thoughts capture the reality in which the Institute and the postsecondary system throughout the province now finds itself. Exploring the consequences of utilising culture in the management and understanding of problems associated with student feedback on instruction, allows for further debate of a very complex issue. An institution's culture often acts as the buffer against any negative effects of processes or practices. With reference to the student feedback process, the type of process chosen and implemented reflects what is perceived by individuals in the organization not to be harmful nor negative to its constituents; it will reflect their culture.

Accountability

Accountability in education is an elusive construct which is not easy to monitor nor manage when dealing with both system inputs and outputs. This is similar for the quality issue. Although one may attribute interest in the quality aspect of education to be recent, references to quality in instruction followed along with the development of student feedback on instruction programs. Barnett (1992) discussed assessment in terms of conflict between the expansion and squeezing of resources. Bogue and Saunders (1992) argued that having a strategic and unifying vision of quality as being necessary if the institutions are to serve the needs of the client within their resource base. Improvement in the quality of instruction is something that institutions want their instructors to strive for as available funding continues to be reduced while competition for students increases. Institutions need to come to terms with the reality of the present economic and political world.

Hittman (1993) stated that the goal of education should be the continuous effort to meet stakeholder's expectations. With the emphasis on both accountability and quality issues, he cautioned against believing that complex problems have simple solutions.

> Despite the compelling need to fix problems immediately, educators should use a holistic, systemic approach to improve educational quality. Evaluating quality requires identifying those performance measures that will provide meaningful information on how to modify the process without diminishing student access. While it takes more time to implement this approach, the rewards are more satisfying and permanent. (p. 36)

Although a prescriptive look, the premise of a holistic, systemic approach is in keeping with the intent and purpose of most student feedback systems. Inherent in the word "feedback" is an ongoing communication loop. The loop encompasses initiation, identification, evaluation and implementation of results in an effort to improve what is ultimately delivered to the students and employers.

Recognizing the multitude of factors which comprise the process of teaching, Gray (1991) suggested that instead of focusing on student outcomes, which he stated is a short-term focus, that a broader focus incorporating ongoing development and change at the instructor, program and institutional level, be adopted. He quoted Marchese

(1987) who proposed that "Assessment per se guarantees nothing by way of improvement...only when used in combination with good instruction...in a program of improvement, can the device strengthen education" (p. 8). The focus becomes a systemic process, one of gathering the data for the purpose of improving the teaching which, it is anticipated, will have a positive effect on the quality of the instruction.

Chickering and Reisser (1993), in their discussion on teaching and learning did not ignore the growing importance now placed on accountability.

> How long can we ignore the fact that teaching, and teaching well, is the primary justification for our existence, for our support from public and private sources, the tax-exempt status of our institutions. The signals are becoming clearer and stronger every year. Assessment mandates.....some emphasizing improvement, others explicitly interested in accountability, have spread nationwide....Movements are growing to increase consumer choice between institutions so that the market can be driven by quality considerations. (p. 387)

Instructional excellence is definitely a quality issue. How that translates into performance measures is not clear from the literature reviewed other than to focus on the reality that system input and output will be measured against predetermined norms. Many support the contention that there are minimal quantifiable data which absolutely demonstrate a substantial correlation between instructor quality and student achievement. It is clear from the literature that there is some positive relationship between instructor quality and student achievement. If an effective student evaluation system continuously evaluates and provides feedback for improvement and the resources are available to implement proposed improvement suggestions, this should ultimately have a measurable positive effect on student performance. One common thought underlying the accountability issue is that it is far easier to monitor and measure outcomes than it is to measure inputs.

This entire area of measuring performance, in an effort to address accountability, is just emerging in the literature. However, many of the input and output measures that have been reported for some time have not necessarily been used for comparing institutions. The new thrust in postsecondary education appears to be tying an institution's performance to funding. This reality will more than likely be a dominant topic in future research that intends to examine almost any aspect of institutional performance.

Summary

What now appears to be materializing in the literature is the confirmed understanding that there is value associated with evaluation tools, that this information cannot be looked at in isolation, and that it must be reflective of the current environment of the institution. The evolution of evaluation has seen this concept grow from a fairly informal process to a conventional requirement. It is now a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional approach to, not only evaluating instruction for improvement purposes, but relating how that contributes to the overall mission of the institution. In this broad context, the institutional culture is a strong determining factor in how effective a student feedback program will be.

On final analysis of the literature, it was discerned that many constructs have a tremendous impact on the student feedback on instruction process if an institution wants to implement an effective evaluation program. Specifically the internal variables such as: (a) organizational culture, (b) supportive leadership within the institution, (c) instructor and student motivation, (d) availability of faculty development programs which might include alternate methods of course delivery, such as collaborative learning, student-centered learning activities, the impact of technology, and (e) the external environment within which all of these interact. These will all have an impact on the effectiveness of any evaluation process that an institution approves and ultimately implements. As Andrews (1985) succinctly encapsulated, "An administrative evaluation system, properly carried out by competent administrators and supported by governing boards, can provide for the excellence in instruction that is being demanded by society" (p 162). He proposed several positive outcomes if a properly designed evaluation system is in place. The system will:

1. allow for well-deserved recognition for the most competent instructors;
2. motivate the average instructor to be more than average; and,
3. provide for just-cause dismissal for those who remain incompetent.

If the purpose of providing student feedback on instruction is for the ultimate improvement of instruction, then it would appear, from the literature that a stand-alone process will not provide an institution's stakeholders with the type of information needed to support the goal of instructional excellence.

Examining key research, the historical framework and the ever-increasing internal and external dynamics which have an effect on the student feedback on instruction programs, provided a focus for this research and assisted in finetuning the research question. It also provided direction for the research and design considerations that are described in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Method

This chapter discusses the research design and the methods used to address the research question. The following research-related issues are addressed in this chapter: (a) the permission to conduct the study, (b) the selection of the sample and sample plan, (c) the development of the research instruments, (d) pilot testing of the research instruments, and (e) how the data were collected and analysed are presented.

Statement of the Problem

It was important to review the research question prior to any attempt to design a research method that would address the problem appropriately. The intent of the research was to determine if the student feedback on instruction process, particularly the SFIF, at the Institute, is effective in assuring that instructional improvement goals are optimized. Other questions that arose from the research question revolved around the following activities which include: (a) an examination of the policies, processes, and outcomes,(b) an analysis of the perceived satisfaction levels of the stakeholders, and (c) recommendations for improvement associated with the Institute's student feedback on instruction process.

Permission to Complete the Research

The research proposal was presented to the Director of Research at the Institute. He recommended that the research be undertaken. Based on that recommendation, the research was approved (see Appendix A) by the Academic Vice-President of the Institute. It was agreed that all data gathering instruments would be submitted to the Director of Research for final approval prior to any data collection.

Participation of the program heads, instructors, and students was not anticipated to be an obstacle, nor was it one. One factor that may have adversely impacted the ability to get volunteers for the interviews was the current climate at the institute; in an effort to meet projected budget targets, staff layoffs from each division were imminent and overall workload had increased. To determine how much of an effect these issues would have on securing volunteers, two instructors were asked to participate in a pilot study and they willingly volunteered their time. A third instructor and a program supervisor were also interviewed to finetune the final interview schedule. All pilot participants felt what was being asked of them was not intrusive on their time. Further, when directly asked if they believed the current climate at the Institute and within the postsecondary system would negatively affect how they responded to the questions, they felt not.

Research Design

The case method was used to address the research question. As Miklos (1992) noted, "The case study strategy is used when a researcher wishes to gain a more comprehensive understanding of certain phenomena than is likely to result from a survey" (p. 24). Primarily, the research focused on the stakeholders' perceptions of the policies, processes,and outcomes associated with the student feedback on instruction process at the Institute. The research was qualitative and descriptive in nature. Participants were chosen from three main stakeholder groups -- students, instructors and program supervisors -- since the student feedback on instruction process involved all three groups.

Prior to carrying out data collection (surveys and interviews), two interrelated activities occurred. First, a profile of the institution was researched. It included an overview of the institute, its role in the postsecondary system and a summary of its operational descriptors. That information was necessary for the researcher to determine the basis for the sample identification. Due to anonymity issues, much of that information is not provided in this thesis. Second, a historical examination of records associated with the student feedback process was completed.

One participant from two of the original stakeholder groups (instructors and administrators) was interviewed to develop an appreciation for the motivation and intent surrounding the decision to adopt the process now in place. Historic records, particularly minutes of meetings and summary reports on the student feedback process were also analyzed. That results provided a substantial amount of valuable information for the background for this study and it provided a relevant focus for the researcher.

Sample and Sampling Plan

The target population included any individual who taught or took courses, either part- or full-time, in a postsecondary technical institute and any person who held an academic supervisory position in the same. The accessible population included all instructors, students and academic supervisors in the four academic divisions of the Institute. Those who participated in the survey were:

1. students in their second year of a full-time diploma program in each division and who had completed at least two SFIF (20 per division; n = 80; total population N = 7200). Of the 80 students, 75% (or 60) were considered representative by the researcher.
2. instructors from each of the academic divisions who had taught full-time at the institute for a minimum

of three years (18 per division; n = 72; total population N = 770). Of the 72 instructors, 75% (or 54) were considered representative by the researcher. Those who were interviewed included:

1. two program heads (minimum three years) from each division who are responsible for completion of annual performance appraisals for instructors (n = 8; total population N = 70).
2. two instructors as identified above from each division (N = 8).

Student and faculty volunteers for the surveys. Of the 72 instructors who were to be randomly contacted, 16 were selected from the divisions, but not from the same program in the division, to participate in the first phase of the data collection. The 16 instructors were contacted by telephone and asked to assist in the research by: (a) completing an instructor survey, and (b) by also distributing a student survey to a random selection of five students in any of their second-year classes (See Appendix B for the follow-up memo that was sent to these 16 volunteers). This process ensured that there be representative student (a possible 80 student volunteers if all the surveys were returned) and faculty feedback across the divisions which would reflect the views and perceptions of those two groups on an institute-wide basis.

Completed packages were returned from all 16 instructors. Of those returned, there were 16 valid instructor surveys; of the 79 student surveys returned, there were 74 were valid surveys. The five invalid student surveys were completed by students who were in year one of their program; the student return rate was 93%.

The instructor surveys were then sent to the remaining 56 instructors from the four divisions. In addition to the initial 16 instructor surveys, 40 more surveys (n = 56) were returned for a return rate of 75%.

Instructor and supervisor interview volunteers. To secure volunteers for the interview portion of the research, the following procedure was used:

1. the last question on the instructor survey requested that any instructor who wished to participate further by volunteering to be interviewed was to indicate that desire on the survey. Two instructors per division were then chosen. This was a randomly selected group initially and the researcher used discretion in choosing the volunteers based on program size and variation in program type by division.
2. two program supervisors per division were contacted personally and asked to volunteer to be interviewed. This was a purposive selection. The researcher used

discretion in choosing the volunteers based on program size and variation in program type by academic division.

Selection of Survey Instruments

Interviews were chosen as a data gathering method since this method would provide the interviewer with a rich source of data. This was found to be particularly true in areas where interviewees' views and perceptions on various aspects of the process were important to the research. Interviews also allowed the interviewer to probe participants regarding their perceptions on the value of the process; interviews also gave participants an opportunity to reflect on their recommendations.

Surveys were chosen as a second data collection method specifically to examine the administrative process and to supplement the interview data. The intent was to gather descriptive statistics. Not all questions on the survey instrument were close-ended; specific clarification was requested for certain questions, particularly those that asked the participants to support a choice they made or were requested to provide recommendations. The student and instructor surveys were purposely designed to be parallel in form so that in addition to the individual questions analyses by group, comparative analysis of responses would be possible between instructors and students.

Design of the instruments. When generating the initial questions, the review of the literature provided a framework for segmenting the questions as well as ensuring that the language was appropriate for all the volunteers. This was of particular importance for the student survey questionnaire as the language surrounding student feedback used by the researcher may easily have been misinterpreted by that group. The literature review also assisted the researcher in developing questions that would reduce bias either in favor of, or not in favor of, the student feedback process. Clear written communications became very important for the questionnaires since the researcher did not deliver the instruments to the participants nor was the researcher available to assist if any questions about the questionnaires arose.

Attached as Appendix C is a copy of the interview schedule that was used as a pilot test for the questions. The intent was to develop a series of questions that would serve two purposes:

1. to provide questions for the interview schedule that was to be used for interviewing instructors and program supervisors, and
2. to test questions that would be used to develop a survey questionnaire for the students and instructors.

Piloting the interview schedule. Since the desire was to develop a schedule that was on the research topic and one which would provide the basis for all the research instruments, a pilot test was undertaken with two instructors from the sample group. Each instructor was from a different academic division; they were asked to participate in the pilot study as was one program supervisor. It was believed that they would provide valuable feedback; all agreed to participate. The interviewees were informed that their responses would be audio-taped and that the purpose of the exercise was to refine the interview schedule that would be used to gather subsequent data for the research.

The pilot participants were requested to critique the questions after the interview to determine if the wording of the questions was appropriate and if they felt that some questions should be added or deleted. They were also requested to comment on the flow of the interview and to provide feedback on: (a) the interview process in terms of the logistics involved, (b) the number of contacts made with the interviewer prior the interview (original contact and follow-up confirmation), and (c) the length of time that the interview took.

One pilot interview with an instructor was held and the schedule modified to reflect the feedback. A second pilot interview with another instructor was held using the revised schedule. After the second interview, the comments from the pilot interviewees were incorporated into a revised interview schedule. Questions for the survey questionnaires as well as the surveys' format were developed. The interview schedule was then reviewed with one final volunteer.

Piloting the schedule was a valuable step in the process and the intent of using the pilot schedule to develop the student and instructor surveys (See Appendix D and E) was met with success. The two interview schedules plus the two survey questionnaires were submitted to the Institute's director of research for approval. Minor modifications were noted and final changes made in preparation for distribution.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

As noted in the discussion on piloting the interview schedule, four data gathering instruments were developed. Two semi-structured scripted interview schedules; one was designed for instructors (Appendix F), and the second one (Appendix G) was designed for the program supervisor. Both of these instruments were pilot-tested with volunteers from the sample group (three instructors and one program supervisors) prior to finalizing the interview schedules. The two remaining instruments (one for the instructors and one for students) were survey questionnaires. It was anticipated that the resulting data would be used to provide descriptive statistics particularly regarding the administration of the process as well as to support the interview data results.

All of the data gathering instruments were developed from information obtained through the literature review, outcomes from the pilot interviews, and from discussions with instructors and program supervisors. To ensure that the terminology in the questionnaires was correct for the student environment, discussion on the terminology was held with two students. Further discussion on data collection is addressed as part of the validity issues presented later in this chapter. The researcher made sure that the study conformed to the University of Alberta ethical guidelines for the treatment of human subjects.

Interviews. Sixteen interviews were held between April 20 and May 10, 1995. Interviews were held with the following people:

1. eight instructors, two from each academic division, chosen at the discretion of the researcher from the initial 16 instructor volunteers to ensure cross-institutional representation of views and opinions from eight different program. These 16 were chosen from the random selection of the 72 instructors who were identified to participate in the research.

2. eight program supervisors, two from each academic division, chosen at the discretion of the researcher to ensure cross-institutional representation of views and opinions from eight different program. Care was taken to choose a broad representation of small to large programs to capture the diversity of thoughts from the various areas of the Institute.

Each interview volunteer was personally contacted by phone to: (a) request their participation, (b) arrange for a meeting time and place, and (c) inform them that the interview would be audio-taped. A follow-up memo was sent to each participant prior to the interview; only one interviewee needed to be rescheduled. In addition to audio-taping the interviews, notes were also taken to record the non-verbal (i.e., body language) communication provided by the interviewees.

Survey questionnaires. Eighty surveys were distributed to second-year students through an instructor in their program. Broader representation was given to two of the divisions since they had the greater number of two-year programs. Of the valid questionnaires, these two divisions (Division 1 and 2) represented 73% of the returned student responses. All invalid questionnaires were from Division 2 and were not used in the data analysis.

Table 2

Valid Cases - Student Participants

Division	Summary of Participation		Percentage Returned
	Number Requested	Number Returned	
Division 1	35	35	47.3
Division 2	25	19	25.7
Division 3	5	5	6.8
Division 4	15	15	20.3
TOTAL	80	74	100.0

Seventy-two instructors were randomly selected from the Institute's 1995/96 program calendar. Of those 72, 16 were contacted personally and then sent a covering memorandum and an interview package which contained the following:

1. one instructor survey questionnaire;
2. five student survey questionnaires; and
3. instructions for completing the above and returning the surveys.

These instructors were sent their packages on April 3, 1995 (See Appendix B). All 16 packages were returned; there were 16 valid instructor questionnaires and 74 valid student questionnaires.

On April 24, 1995, the remaining 56 instructors were sent a memorandum (Appendix H) and a survey to complete. Of these, 40 were completed and returned. Participation by division is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Valid Cases - Instructor Participants

Division	Participation		Percentage	
	Number Requested	Number Returned	by Division	of Total
Division 1	18	13	72.2	23.3
Division 2	18	17	94.4	30.3
Division 3	18	13	72.2	23.3
Division 4	18	13	72.2	23.2
	72	56	77.7	100.0

Data Analysis

Within the context of the literature reviewed, certain themes emerged, specifically: (a) the myths associated with student feedback, (b) the perceived utility of such programs, (c) the significance of the institution's culture, and (d) the emerging quality and accountability issues affecting postsecondary education.

All of the instruments (both of the surveys and the two interview guides) were designed so that a logical flow of information would be gathered in each of the following areas:

1. basic demographic information to allow for organization of this research and to make comparisons by division;
2. feedback associated with the actual administration of the SFIF to the students;

3. feedback from all stakeholders associated with their understanding of why students are required to complete the SFIF;
4. feedback associated with each stakeholders understanding of what the feedback is used for - its purpose;
5. feedback on the stakeholders perceived value of the process and how they feel the process can be improved.

In addition to the above, the interviews with the instructors and program heads probed other areas. The interview guide was designed to also gather data on the interviewees' perception of the appropriateness of a student feedback process within

1. a CQI environment;
2. the provinces' current emphasis on accountability; and,
3. the Institute's professional development activities.

As was expected, additional themes emerged after the data were collected and analysed. A thematic analysis was conducted using both an inductive and deductive approach. What emerged were further substantive themes which are discussed below. The data analyses, then, were based on the literature review and the data collected from the research.

The data were continually examined on different levels and their relationship to the various themes that emerged. The final themes that resulted from the data analysis were a culmination of, in some instances, several similar categories. All of the data gathered were examined from the perspective of the Institute (as a whole) and also by each division, as well as a comparative analysis between instructor and student responses.

Interview data. The data gathered from the interviews were transcribed from the researcher's audiotapes and the information was sorted initially into the above categories or themes. Other broad categories which surfaced were: (a) administrative process, (b) purpose, awareness and intent, and (3) value in a CQI environment.

Survey questionnaire data. Data gathered from the surveys were compiled and the descriptive statistics (frequency counts and mean responses) for each question analysed. This was done on a micro level by division for the instructor data to determine if perceptions were different among divisions. All data were also analyzed on a macro level on an institute-wide basis. Comparisons were then made between instructor responses and student responses where the same basic questions were asked of each group; similarities and differences were noted. These comparisons were not done by division; it was felt that an examination of these two groups at a macro level only was sufficient to note the similarities and/or differences between the groups.

All of the responses to the open-ended question from the survey were compiled. Those data, as anticipated, were excellent sources of: (a) information on the student feedback process, and (b) recommendations to the process. These data were further analysed in light of responses from the interviews; the interview data provided a framework with the descriptive statistics and responses to the open-ended questions providing the support to much of what was said during the interviews.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Design

Strengths. Given the research question, the restrictions and limitations associated with a case study of this nature, it is felt, after looking broadly at the research design, that there were several general strengths. These included:

1. choosing the sample and ensuring all key stakeholders were represented;
2. completing pilot interviews to test the questions which were then used to design the interview guides and the survey questionnaires;
3. personally contacting and following-up with the participants; sixteen instructors were contacted

directly to ensure they and their students met the criteria before becoming involved in the research;

4. timing the collection of data which was a crucial element to ensure sufficient robust data to evaluate;
5. using different instruments to collect the data; and,
6. having all of the interviews, both for the pilot study and actual research interviews, completed by the researcher.

Key to the entire process was ensuring that the research instruments were strong enough to solicit the types of responses that would allow the researcher to address the research question. The first pilot interview took place using a draft interview schedule. It was based on the original literature review. Comments and interaction with the first interviewee allowed reexamination of the content and sequencing of questions. These were changed to reflect the feedback from the pilot interview as well as the addition of other questions designed to elicit direct information important to the research question.

Information gaps were noted during the first interview. Those gaps became very evident as the flow from one question to another was not "in sync." A more fluid questioning flow was developed while going through the interview by the addition of several questions which appeared to be a natural extension of either a previous question or a particular thought process that was occurring on the part of either the interviewer or interviewee.

When the second interview took place using the revised schedule, the interviewer used the revised guide to ensure clarity and flow of the questions. Specific questions from the original schedule had changed. Questions directly relating to the administration of the student feedback form were clustered together and those that required subjective interpretation by the interviewee, were clustered and flowed more naturally.

The schedule underwent the final modest modifications and the survey questionnaires were then designed following the same basic structure and flow as the interview guide. The pilot process was extremely beneficial in developing not only additional, relevant questions, but also in clarification and flow of existing questions.

Initially working with a structured set of questions appeared as though it may be a weakness in the research design. The researcher would have felt more comfortable with an open interviewing process but quickly adjusted to a more structured process. This was not a pure process. Other questions often developed from the interviewees' responses, from a particular thought pattern, from key words, so, that open structure was evident even though the original intent was for a structured interview. In the final analysis, that type of interaction probably enhanced the quality of the data.

All interviewees were quite comfortable. The researcher appreciated the seriousness and helpfulness extended by all of them during the interview. The atmosphere was relaxed yet the tone, due to the topic area, was very serious; the responses appeared to be given from genuine assessment of their experiences. Each interviewee was able to answer all of the questions. Perhaps the most exciting part of the interview process was observing revelation in the interviewee's responses as they obviously discovered, or reflected on their answers during the interview, a new way to look at some aspect of the process or made comments aloud as to what they would do in the future. By the third interview, the researcher was very comfortable with the flow of questions and with the quality of the rich responses. It was at the end of this interview that the belief was firmly cemented that the instrument was workable.

Weaknesses. Weaknesses in the design were most evident to the researcher when the research was delimited to include only second-year students in the research. This excluded the following student groups: (a) those whose program requires only one year to complete, and (b) all other students who may be at the Institute for programs that do not conform to the 16- or 17-week format. It is suspected that their comments would have been similar to the student groups that were surveyed. Statements and recommendations that address students refer to the entire student population at the Institute and are not to be generalized to any one division.

Another weakness could be related to the random selection of instructors. Randomly selecting 16 instructors whose classes met the criteria and were fairly representative of the second-year student population was an onerous task. Many instructors who were initially contacted to participate in the student portion of the study did not meet the criteria. Finding the correct sample of instructors was time-consuming since many may have been teaching only first- or second-year courses, or a combination of both for the final semester. There was also the consideration that many of the classes were labs with students now working on projects having completed the theory portion of the course. Others were off campus working on projects and the instructors were only going to see them during the last week of classes. This was deemed to be too late since it was so close to final examination time and it was felt this would impact on the quality of responses.

For many programs in one of the divisions, students spend their entire second year in a work experience situation. For a second division, there were only three two-year programs. On the front end of the research, this administrative task was the most tedious and time-consuming although the importance to the researcher of having this process followed rigidly was extremely important.

Validity

Validity issues were examined based on Cook and Campbell's (1979) threat to validity framework. Prior to the distribution of the instruments, each was pilot tested to minimize the threat to construct validity. Construct validity was enhanced by virtue of collecting so many different types of data from a cross section of stakeholders. Evaluation apprehension and researcher expectations were possible threats to the interview process.

The internal validity issues that may have been threats were mortality and instrumentation particularly for the survey portion. The high return rate of valid surveys minimized these as threats to validity. Given the time of the academic year, it was important that distribution take place prior to the end of the fourth semester and also at a point where students were not yet too involved with preparation for final examinations.

Timing for this portion of the research was important; it was also not deemed appropriate to have the distribution of the survey too close to the students' return from their mid-term break. This left a relatively small window of time for distribution and collection of the survey.

With respect to external validity, interaction of selection may have been a threat with the program supervisors from one of the divisions, as all are known personally by, and were peers of, the researcher. There was a concern that statistical conclusion validity would be threatened by random irrelevancies for the student group but that was minimized, it was felt, by careful planning on the part of the researcher to exclude as many intervening variables as possible. It was discerned that the main threat would be timing, as noted previously. Reliability of treatment, in this case conducting the interviews reliably, may also have had an affect but a template of delivery instructions was designed to minimize this threat. Although stated earlier, but bears further mention, is that generalizability to other than a two-year postsecondary technical institutions of similar diversity should be made with caution.

Interaction of history and treatment was not considered a threat as the process of instruction has withstood the test of time as noted in much of the literature on this topic. What may not have been accounted for and was difficult to assess is how students and instructors "key" into the term "generally" when answering questions on the survey; it was hoped, and then confirmed by the interviewees' thoughtful verbal responses, that they were not relying on a single positive or negative experience when answering the questions.

Summary

This chapter revisited the research question and explained how permission to complete the research was secured. The research design for the case study was outlined and the process for data collection and analyses described. Validity issues were discussed as they related to the research design.

The section on research design primarily described how the sample was chosen. Also, the process employed to develop and refine data collection instruments was described. Since these instruments were designed by the researcher, a pilot study was undertaken. The value of the pilot study to the research was also presented.

The next section of Chapter 3 described in detail how data were collected and analysed. Strengths and weaknesses of the research design were discussed as were the validity issues associated with the research design.

The next chapter presents a profile of the respondents, a description of the various themes that emerged from the data analysis and the results of the data. This chapter will provide the framework for the discussion in Chapter 5 on the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis and Presentation of Data

This chapter presents the findings from the data analysis and focuses specifically on data gathered from interviews with instructors and program supervisors. Where appropriate, descriptive statistics are provided to either support or negate the findings from the qualitative data. The other data from the survey questionnaires for instructors and students are presented as they relate to the research question. During the data analysis, the following questions are also discussed. These include:

1. What are the policies and processes by means of which the SFIF is prepared and administered to students?
2. What are the policies and processes by means of which the SFIF data are:
   (a) made available to stakeholder groups?
   (b) acted upon for the improvement of instruction?
   (c) acted upon for administrative purposes?
3. What are the outcomes of the student feedback on instruction practices as perceived by the stakeholder groups?
4. What are the perceived satisfaction levels of stakeholder groups with the policies, processes, outcomes, and with the SFIF as a tool?

5. What are the recommendations of the stakeholder groups for the improvement of the SFIF and related processes for the evaluation and improvement of instruction?

Consideration is given to the data gathered on the interviewees' perceptions of the appropriateness of this type of student feedback mechanism within a CQI environment and as a possible reporting mechanism for Key Performance Indicators. As well, the relationship between the student feedback process and the Institute's professional development activities -- which are specifically designed to address instructional improvement concerns -- is examined.

Data are presented as they relate to the themes that emerged during the literature review and the data analysis They are: (a) purpose, (b) process, (c) utility, (d) accountability, and (e) culture. Prior to discussion of the major themes, descriptive background information that was deemed important by the researcher in "making sense" of the participants' responses was summarized. It also put these responses in the context of the research question. This summary is referenced throughout the discussion of findings.

Background Information on Study Participants

Prior to examining the research data, it became important to assign pseudonyms for study participants to ensure that comments and patterns of responses were easily attributable to the correct individual and division. This also assisted the researcher in completing the comparative data analysis by division. Table 4 provides a listing of instructor and supervisor participants by division. It should be noted that members of each division have been given names beginning with the same letter so that they can easily be recognized.

Table 4

Pseudonyms for Study Participants

Division	Instructors		Supervisors	
Division 1	Dean	Deb	Don	Dick
Division 2	Ken	Kevin	Kirk	Keith
Division 3	Giselle	Gerry	George	Glen
Division 4	Jake	James	José	Jen

Since the main intent of this study is to examine whether instructional improvement occurs as a result of the student feedback process, it was felt that background information (see Table 5) on the instructor participants would provide a context for many of their comments. This information was taken from the questionnaire they completed prior to their interview. The researcher reviewed these comments before each interview as a way of setting the stage for the discussion.

The Findings as the Relate to Selected Themes

Selected themes that emerged from the literature review and the analysis of the data collected were: (a) purpose,

Table 5

Background on Instructor Participants

Division	Name	Number of Years Teaching	Student [1] Qualified?	SFIF [2] Valuable?	Week Completed	Primary Purpose	Student[3] Sign?	Share [4] Results?
1	Dean	8	yes	No	14	Instructor Improvement	No	No
	Deb	5	yes	Yes	7	General Feedback	No	Yes
2	Ken	5	yes	Yes	16	Course Improvement	No	No
	Kevin	5	yes	Yes	8	Course Improvement	Yes	Yes
3	Giselle	9	yes	Yes	8	General Feedback	Yes	Some
	Gerry	3	yes	No	12	Course Improvement	Yes	No
4	Jake	7	Some	No	11	General Feedback	Yes	No
	James	19	Some	Some	11	Course Improvement	Yes	Yes

[1] Question asked if the instructors felt the students were qualified to complete the SFIF.
[2] Question asked if the instructors found the SFI feedback valuable.
[3] Question asked if the student should sign the feedback form.
[4] Question asked if the instructor shares the results with anyone.

(b) process, (c) utility, (d) accountability, and (e) culture.

Selection of themes

A final level of data analysis was undertaken and the data sorted into the themes identified in Table 6. Descriptive comments for each theme were the result of combining categories of data at each level of the data analysis.

Table 6

Selected Research Themes

Theme	Descriptive Comments
Purpose	- communicating goals and intent - acceptance by stakeholder groups - understanding how SFI is used - reward/incentive
Process Issues	- administration of the program - validity of the instrument - format of the instrument - disclosure of results - absence of a feedback loop - professional development activities
Utility Issues	- validity and bias associated with SFIF - quality of information - interpretation of results - value to the stakeholders
Accountability	- to stakeholders - appropriateness of the tool - consistency with other institutions
Culture	- organizational culture - philosophy of quality - impact from external environment

The remainder of the chapter examines the relationship between the selected themes and the data collected during the interviews and from the surveys.

Purpose

The data analysis revealed that the purpose, or expected outcome, of the student feedback process was not consistently understood by the major stakeholders. Many interesting descriptive comments emerged. A number of the interviewees' statements supported the contention that the intended primary purpose is not well understood nor communicated effectively to this stakeholder group.

There are three primary objectives that govern the present student feedback process at the Institute:

1. The results of the student evaluation should provide instructors with feedback for self-improvement to ensure that instructional improvement goals are optimized. Formative feedback is the primary purpose of the process.
2. Descriptive statistical information gathered from all programs is used to generate reports that should provide the Institute with feedback on the quality of instruction on an institute-wide basis. This is the secondary purpose.
3. Student feedback may be used for summative purpose only in situations where a student or supervisor

initiates the feedback process. This process was not included in the present research.

To determine if instructors understood the primary purpose of collecting student feedback data, responses from two interview questions were analysed. They were:

1. What is your understanding of the Institute's policy on student feedback on instruction?
2. What do you do with the results once you receive them?

Depending on their response to the second question, some interviewees were asked specifically if they: (a) used the feedback results to improve their instruction, and (b) sought any type of professional development activity specifically related to what was learned from the feedback.

Formative purposes. In response to the first question, only one instructor, Dean, (See Table 5) stated that the primary purpose was to receive feedback on instruction. Four instructors (Ken, Kevin, Gerry and James) stated that it was to receive feedback on the course. Three instructors (Deb, Giselle and Jake) stated that they felt the primary purpose was for general course improvement which included instructor and course improvement.

In response to the second question, four instructors (Deb, Ken, Kevin and Giselle), felt that the information they received from the feedback could be helpful to them in improving their instruction. Of these four, none felt the primary purpose was for instructional improvement. Jake and James elaborated on this point stating that the feedback was very useful when the process was first in place but as time went on, they felt there was "...little new information." They indicated that much of what was being told to them via the feedback, had been summarized in previous feedback results. Jake recalled making changes to his instructional style when he first began to teach but he did not attribute those changes to feedback he received from students.

Two instructors, Dean and Giselle, stated that they found minimal "new" information from the student feedback but felt that positive feedback results motivated them. Giselle indicated it was the only way she was "...told that I am doing a good job."

Five instructors (Dean, Deb, Kevin, Giselle, and James) indicated that when they first started receiving the feedback, they pursued professional development activities based on the results. The most sought-after activity was additional training in classroom management activities. Ken was the only instructor to seek additional training in computer software to enhance the materials that were delivered to the students in class but was not sure if that was prompted by feedback results.

All felt that the feedback played a minimal role in choosing professional development activities. One stated that he had not considered the feedback when choosing these activities. Due to the timing of most professional development activities at the Institute, one instructor (Kevin) indicated the inability to participate in any of these since many instructors in their division still had teaching responsibilities until the end of June. The majority of professional development activities are completed by that time so there is no opportunity for him to participate in courses related to instructional improvement. He has never sought any type of professional development activities external to the Institute.

It would appear from these responses that the primary purpose of collecting student feedback, that of collecting data for instructional improvement, is different for this group from the intent of the policy. What is understood by seven of the interviewees, is that the feedback results are helpful for either general feedback or for course improvement. The respondents did not appear to differentiate between the two purposes; they are seemingly one and the same.

There is, then, a substantial gap between understanding the goal, which the instructors seem to see in a broad context, and taking action consistent with the stated goal. As noted previously, instructors who acted on the results of the feedback by seeking professional development activities consistent with the feedback results, did so when they first received feedback. As time went on, they often found that there was little new information to act on. These comments are consistent with Centra (1987) who noted that modest changes in instructional improvement occurred when ratings were first used but very little change takes place if they are used continually.

Fifty-one instructors and 74 students completed the survey instrument. Table 7 summarizes what they feel is the primary purpose of completing the student feedback forms.

TABLE 7

Primary Purpose of Completing the SFIF

Primary Purpose	Instructors		Students	
	Number*	Percentage	Number*	Percentage
How students feel about instruction	9	17.6	10	13.5
For course improvement	11	21.6	19	25.7
For instructional improvement	24	47.1	31	41.9
For supervisor	0	0	7	9.5
Other	7	13.7	7	9.5
Total	51	100.00	74	100.00

* number of valid cases

The responses in Table 7 include the instructors who were interviewed. These data indicate that almost half of the instructors see the primary purpose of the student feedback process is that of improving instruction. These results are higher than the instructor group who were interviewed. It is suspected, but difficult to confirm, that the instructors who chose to be interviewed saw a broader purpose to the entire feedback process and felt that they could positively contribute to the research to provide additional clarification of their perception of the process. This may account for the only one-in-eight (12.5%) of the interviewees indicating specifically that the feedback process was for instructional improvement as compared to 23 of the 43 (53%) instructors surveyed.

Approximately 18% of instructors and 14% of students felt that the primary purpose of the feedback was to indicate how students felt about the course. That was in sharp contrast to the supervisors. None of the supervisors interviewed felt that the primary purpose was for students to indicate how they felt about the course. Similar to the instructor group, 50% of the supervisors felt the primary purpose was for instructional improvement.

One comment from James, who has been in an instructional position for 19 years and followed closely the development of the present process stated that the entire process was "political, an administrative task." He personally found some value in the feedback but felt he collected ongoing feedback during his classes and that this was more valuable than the results from the student feedback forms. This is consistent with CQI philosophies.

It was evident that the primary purpose for collecting student feedback as outlined in the guidelines is not the purpose identified by a large proportion of the instructors. This could be attributed in part to the introductory statement on the student feedback form which reads "...it is continually necessary to improve courses and the quality of instruction" (See Appendix I). The first 13 standard questions on the feedback form do request feedback on instructor behavior. The final question asks if the student feels that the questionnaire is an appropriate way for them to indicate how they feel about the course and the instruction. Students are also asked to address such broad questions as what they liked about the class, things they would like to see changed or improved and also a request is made on their opinion about textbooks, marks, and other aspects of the course.

It is apparent from the questionnaire that the instrument itself not only requests feedback on behavioral aspects of instruction, but extends the questioning to include information on various aspects of the course. If instructors only identified the purpose of the feedback from the information on the questionnaire and the questions themselves, that would account for those instructors who feel that the primary purpose was for course improvement or a combination of course and instructional improvement.

Instructors were very clear that the feedback was not to be used for summative purposes. That is in contrast to the 10% of the students surveyed who thought it was the primary purpose of completing the form. Approximately 80% of the students are informed of the process prior to completion of their first form. They may misunderstand the purpose if it was not explained to them clearly or if they had preconceived ideas that the results would be used for summative purposes.

It is difficult to achieve the goal of optimizing instruction when the intended purpose of the feedback is not consistently understood by the stakeholders. As discussed, the preamble information on the instrument is misleading since the primary purpose is for formative evaluation. Several selected comments from the interviewees address that point when they stated, "...they comment on everything from the price of books to how much they use them; classroom and course-related issues..." and, "...to be quite honest, from their point of view, I wouldn't be able to distinguish that, because some of the questions are related to the course, so then it gets confusing."

These comments point to the need to clarify the purpose on the instrument itself, particularly in the instructions, if the purpose remains one of improving instructional quality. If the misunderstanding of purpose remains, it will continue to confuse the stakeholder groups. This could easily result in frustration and lack of trust. James described a scenario where students provided feedback and

> ...I found out later from the students that the instructor made an overhead of all the comments and evaluation form and spent one whole lecture hour talking to the students about this but in this instance he was trying to identify which student made which comment and intimidated them into essentially non-response. And again, this indicates to me that some instructors don't understand what the role of this instrument is ...

Results from the program supervisors varied on their understanding of the purpose. Four supervisors stated that the feedback was to be used for instructional improvement goals and four indicated it was for instructional and course improvement. There was no apparent difference in responses between divisions. It was very clear that each program supervisor was aware that the feedback was for formative purposes. Each mentioned that their part in the process was minimal. Program supervisors felt they are only to ensure that the process is carried out as required although there is a variance in their understanding of how that should be accomplished.

Three supervisors, Dick, José, and Jen, discussed the absence of a "feedback loop" and thought this needed to be part of the student feedback process. Since it was not, the supervisors were unable to state that instructional improvement goals were realized since they did not have any verifiable proof unless an instructor shared the feedback with them. One supervisor, George, indicated that he had minimal complaints from students so "they must all be doing a good job." That point was well taken although many factors, such as the students' knowledge of the process to bring forward concerns to a program supervisor, would need to be examined before assuming that this is the case.

Interestingly, one supervisor, Jen, felt that it was the instructor's responsibility to share some type of feedback from the classroom with her. If instructors did not voluntarily share feedback, there was a suspicion that there was a reason not to share. This program supervisor would request that the feedback be shared. If the feedback results were not forthcoming, then the supervisor would have one of the instructor's classes complete a supervisor-initiated feedback form. "If year after year an instructor doesn't share, because they don't have to, and I haven't seen any data, then I would use the supervisor initiated one and then I could identify if there was a problem." The remaining supervisors were aware that program supervisors could initiate student feedback forms; only Dick, Keith and Glen, have done so. Five felt there were other ways of getting student feedback and that the present feedback process was administrative by design, for monitoring purposes only.

Program supervisors receive the report produced to provide statistical information to the Institute on the quality of instruction on an institute-wide basis. Dick, Glen, and Jen stated that they shared it with instructors at a staff meetings but in general the report was used or discussed minimally with the instructional staff. As Glen stated, "I look at it and share it with the staff and then we file it. We didn't really know what we were supposed to do with it." The purpose of the report seemed unclear to instructors and the recent decision not to produce these reports annually was appropriate given the minimal utility they provide to the program areas. As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose for these reports is to collect data for broader institutional purposes in program planning and establishing benchmarks to examine the quality of instruction on an institute-wide basis.

Summative purposes. Two instructors, as noted earlier, said that receiving the feedback results was important to them even if they did not use them for instructional or course improvement purposes. It was visible proof that they were doing a good job; it was their reward. As Dean commented, "You really do need to have a good job acknowledged because if you don't, after years, if it is not acknowledged, the process becomes very mechanical." The acknowledgement that is referred to is in the feedback results.

Giselle had spoken extensively about the need to reward excellence in the classroom; that recognition of excellent teaching was lacking at the Institute. To use the instrument in this way would be using it for summative purposes. Unlike feedback that is initiated by students when there are perceived problems in the classroom, it was seldom mentioned in the interviews that feedback could also be solicited for excellence in the classroom. There was an underlying, negative connotation, to the entire student feedback process. The only official way for instructors to communicate excellence in the classroom to the program supervisors was through sharing the feedback results or by having supervisors observe their instruction.

Five instructors strongly felt that the main purpose of the feedback should be to identify ineffective teaching or "problems in the classroom." However, these instructors felt that this was not happening even though the supervisor-initiated process is in place. Two comments from instructors are provided that capture those thoughts. James stated:

> I guess I have taken quite a cynical view of the process. I view the instrument as being diluted to the point of just being window dressing and I think this window dressing actually has become quite apparent to the students...it is obvious to them that chronic difficulties are not changed from one year to the next.

Giselle also addressed this point. She stated:

> There are instructors who have been constantly a concern over many years and the reality is that the students do deserve an opportunity for, you know, a fairer instructor, a clearer, more excited one...they deserve the opportunity to get that and if the feedback comes back year after year ... then surely something can be done. We are accountable.

Both instructors believed that the results of the feedback should be used to recognize when instructional quality is in jeopardy so improvement needs are noted and to then address the needs accordingly. They believed that the process was weak on that point. From the interviews, it was clear that these two instructors knew that the intent of the feedback was formative. They felt that unless the supervisor-initiated feedback mechanism was used where it was known that instructional quality was suffering, then the instructor receiving any negative feedback could easily choose to ignore or not act on the feedback. It becomes the "theory versus the reality."

There are varying thoughts on the purpose of the process but it is believed that within those comments is an understanding that the purpose is to address instructional improvement which ultimately may result in an improved delivery of a course. Instructors are very clear that its use is for formative purposes; ten percent of the students surveyed believe that the primary purpose is summative. Five of the instructors interviewed believed that part of the purpose was to identify ineffective teaching and for supervisors to be able to take some type of action based on that information. This is in contradiction to their understanding that the feedback is not to be used summatively. It may be, though, an apparent expression of their desire to ensure that instructional improvement be realized for all instructors. The absence of a feedback loop does not encourage instructional improvement as noted by the supervisors. Change must be self-initiated and if there is minimal value associated with the process, positive change will likely not occur.

Process

Within the context of this research, the most recurring theme of the student feedback on instruction program at the Institute, and the one which was captured in the surveys, was the process. In general the process included the administering, collecting and interpreting of the results. It would seem that when a process has been in place for many years, particularly where there are different stakeholders involved as with this large institution, that the process becomes clouded. The procedures are not followed consistently; the process becomes variable and possibly unreliable.

An important part of any student feedback system is consistency. As Doyle (1975) stated

> A reasonable evaluation system is one that does not do violence to common sense. Common sense dictates that no data, no system, will ever be perfect, but that selected data carefully collected and interpreted can provide a basis for better personnel decision, better course improvement decisions...to claim and demand more, or to settle for less, is not reasonable.

Key to his comments is the term "reasonable."

Administration of the program. There are guidelines associated with administering the student feedback program at the Institute. Much of the research completed on student feedback systems stresses the need for credibility of the process. This credibility can be achieved through a consistent process for (a) distributing forms to students including delivery of the instruction, (b) timing of the delivery inclusive of the week during the semester and the actual time given during the class, (c) the individual responsible for delivering the student feedback forms and (d) the individual responsible for ensuring the forms are delivered for data processing.

During the review of the literature, many researchers indicated that ensuring consistency increases the validity of the information for the stakeholders. A well-established and attended process is a key factor to the success of a student feedback program. An important component of the any evaluation program, particularly where comparative analysis will be undertaken as is the case at the Institute, is to ensure dependable data by which to make the appropriate comparisons. One primary intent when designing the survey questionnaires was to address the process for administering the student feedback instrument.

Braskamp and Ory (1994) summarized several generalizations they made from a review of applicable literature which they completed in 1985. Their review provides a framework, using a cause and effect approach, to explain the most advantageous factors to accommodate for either (a) planning for implementation of an evaluation system or (b) when designing effective guidelines for such a system. They discussed five factors which address the administration of the process:

1. Ratings are more positive if the instructor remains in the classroom.
2. Ratings are more positive if the stated purpose for the ratings is for summative evaluation.
3. Ratings are less reliable if the student raters can be identified.
4. Ratings in elective courses are higher than in required courses.
5. Ratings in higher-level courses tend to be higher than in lower level courses.

All these points will affect the administration guidelines particularly if any type of comparison between programs and divisions is undertaken.

On the first point, a decision must be made as to which individual administers the form; if it is to be the instructor, then the research suggests the results will be more positive. On the second point, it is important for the raters to clearly know what the intent is since that will have an effect on their rating of the instructor. The third point addresses the issue of anonymity. The fourth point would suggest that all instructors have students rate either elective or required courses, but not a combination. The last point suggests that comparisons should be made on results only among higher-level courses or among lower-level courses but not to compare them across levels.

It was evident from the interviewees' responses that implementation of the process varied throughout programs and divisions. Many factors can be attributed to that reality some of which were gleaned from responses given during the interview. They included: (a) intended use of the feedback, (b) coordination of efforts to ensure one group of students are not continually completing feedback forms, (c) length of the course, (d) type of instructional assignment, (e) expectations and emphasis placed on the process within the program and division and, (f) perceived readiness of the student raters to provide constructive comments. Given the variance associated with administering the process, it would be difficult for the Institute to make any type of reliable comparison of programs or divisions.

Courses for which students provide feedback are normally 16 to 17 weeks long. There are exceptions; an instructor may request feedback from course as short as one eight-hour day, but those instances are not the norm. For the 16 or 17 week courses, there is normally a mid-term exam period which occurs either week eight or nine. The results from the survey questionnaire indicate that approximately 50% of the students complete the feedback between weeks 13 to 15; the remaining 50 percent is spread throughout the semester. In contrast to that, approximately 50% of instructors indicated that they administered the form between weeks 8 to 11 with the remaining 50% spread throughout the semester. A discrepancy exists either in process or perception between the two groups. This finding was interesting to the researcher but must be viewed very tentatively since there are minimal data to draw any research-supported conclusions.

The research results indicated that approximately 35% of instructors delivered the feedback instrument at the beginning of class. Based on Braskamp and Ory (1994), students may rate an instructor more positively if the instructor remained in the classroom. Although it was not known if the instructor actually remains in the class during completion of the form, the fact that the instructor was present with students during that class may not allow students to adequately reflect their feelings for the course; their ratings may be more positive than if they completed them at the end of a class.

According to the students, instructors give out the forms 93% of the time; of that, instructions are provided to the students approximately 61% of the time. This fact may account for the approximately 10% of students who believe the form is for summative purposes, as noted earlier. Those student ratings may be more positive, according to Braskamp and Ory (1994) if the students believe that the feedback will be going to the supervisor. According to the 89% of the instructors who gave out the forms, approximately 70% indicated that they give instructions.

When asked how long it took for the students to complete the form, 20% of instructors noted that, on average, students took less than five minutes. In contrast to that, the 61% of the students indicated it took less than five minutes. It is possible that there exists a subconscious desire on the part of the instructors to believe that the students give thoughtful attention to their responses since 56% of instructors believed that students took between 6 to 10 minutes. Another marked discrepancy of opinion between instructors and students.

The student feedback form accommodates additional comments the student would like to make. For the instructors, 71% indicated that they receive additional comments; in contrast, 37% of students indicated that they provided comments. Again, a large discrepancy which cannot be accounted for is apparent.

It can be said that from the overall emerging picture, there are many process issues where the instructors' perceptions are in stark contrast to students' perceptions or vice versa. The lack of specific reasons for this finding only allows the researcher to draw very general conclusions based on the data. Another set of questions would need to be asked to bring closure to this perception gap. Despite this, the observation is made that the variability in implementing this process reduces the effectiveness of the results to the instructor.

Utility

It became important to determine the value of the student feedback system had with respect to its stated purpose. Many of the findings dealing with the purpose of a student feedback system tie very closely to the value of the system. The difference between the purpose and utility theme may seem slight since fundamentally both address the same point: the value of the process. In terms of this research, discussion on purpose centred around the stakeholders' understanding of the primary purpose of the feedback. Utility refers to how useful the feedback was to the instructors in terms of improving their pedagogy.

Earlier in this chapter, the use of the student feedback results for formative purposes was discussed. It was clearly noted that four instructors, Deb, Ken, Kevin, and Giselle, found that: (a) the feedback could be helpful to them in improving their instruction, (b) the feedback was very useful when the process was first in place, (c) there was little new information being given to them via the feedback, and (d) when they first started receiving the feedback, they did seek professional development activities based on the results.

Program supervisors commented on the usefulness of student feedback results. All stated that their role was minimal in the process. As Don articulated, "...a poor instructor can take the information and not do anything with it; chuck it in the drawer. I don't think for staff, with deep-rooted problems, I don't think it is effective at all. If they choose to ignore it, it is, simply so." Don continued with the following comment about the lack of a feedback loop which he felt was necessary if the process was going to provide value to the instructor and ultimately all stakeholders. "I have never seen one evaluation tool that really gives you the data you need as a supervisor to really do your job well...if you want to supervise, you need more than what we have right now."

Part of the process that is currently in place indicates that the instructor, in consultation with the program supervisor, chooses which class to administer the student feedback. That does not occur with any of the program supervisors. The exception is when they are required to initiate feedback with an instructor. In that instance, it is a "forced" consultative process in that the request is usually from a specific group of students.

Since the purpose of the feedback is not summative, it appears to be the contention of the program supervisors that instructors are fully aware that the results are for instructional improvement purposes. The onus is then on the instructors to use the information for its intended purpose, to improve instruction. As Keith stated, "Sometimes we get complacent and whether we share it or not, if someone has said something negative about you, that is going to impact you, you can't ignore it. Nobody likes to be told." The assumption underlying Keith's comments is based on an expectation that instructors will review the feedback results. There is no guarantee, though, that this is being done. Keith provided an additional insight when he discussed a process that had been in place in his program prior to the present Institute process. Instructors sought feedback individually because they wanted that input from the student. "This tool was more effective because they wanted to do it. I found the instructors who were doing it were certainly the instructors that seemed to be getting a lot more out of the students." What was not stated was whether or not instructors who were marginal or at risk, sought that voluntary feedback. Also, it is difficult to know if instructional improvement occurred when the term "seemed to" is used to evaluate the process.

One program supervisor, Kirk, addressed the validity of the feedback results based on the reports prepared for comparative analysis. Kirk noted that you are able to analyse responses on a question-by-question basis. This will provide feedback to instructors on a program basis without looking at any one individual.

> ....you find things like, "did the students know what the course was about...or the objectives." You have half of the class saying yes and the other half saying no...either you told them or you didn't tell them, or you didn't tell them well enough for them to understand or some of them missed it. Let's go back, as a group, and do a better job of that aspect.

His expectation is that feedback can act as a reminder to staff that "...even small changes make a difference to the students."

Three program supervisors -- Don, José, and Jen -- all questioned whether the students provided sincere, honest feedback on the form and not just quickly checked off the responses. All three encouraged instructors to spread out the collection of feedback and not to request feedback from the same group of students. There is no process in place to ensure this is being done. José commented that a student complained, begrudgingly, that "...he didn't see the point of doing the feedback...he had the feeling that it wasn't used anyway." José was told that when he was an instructor, but has not heard that type of comment since becoming a program supervisor. He stated that "... there is an authority difference that is present as a program supervisor. The comfort level [with the program supervisor] isn't there." He strongly sensed that this variable, whether a result of his perception or not, negatively affected his ability to get a true reading on what the students felt about the instruction in the program.

When the instructors who were surveyed were asked if they felt that the feedback results reflect a true assessment of the course, 38% of the instructors stated that they did; 53% felt that students sometimes provided a true assessment. This is in marked contrast to the 81% of students who felt that they provided a true assessment. Only 1.4% of students felt they did not provide a true assessment as opposed to 9.1% of instructors who felt that students did not provide a true assessment. Clearly there is a perceived difference between instructors and students on this item. These results directly address part of the research question; if one is to determine the value of a process, accuracy of information is extremely important. If such a large percentage of students perceive they are providing accurate feedback, it is important that instructional staff understand this.

Some of the comments made by instructors on why they felt that students did not provide true feedback, or only provided it sometimes, relate to many of the myths addressed in the literature review. Their comments included: (a) "...students lack maturity," (b) "... students use it as a tool of revenge to discredit the instructor or the course," (c) "... it is based on popularity," and (d) "... depends on a particular class mix and dynamics."

Students also commented on why they may not provide accurate feedback. Their comments related to process issues as opposed to myths. Some selected comments include: (a) they believe the instructor is allowed to see the form, (b) they will not see the instructor again so there is no point to the feedback form, and (c) the instructor does not act on the information; nothing changes.

When both groups were asked if they felt that the student feedback form was an meaningful way to provide feedback, approximately 60% of students and 52% of instructors indicated it was appropriate. Only 8% of students and 11% of instructors felt it was not an appropriate way to gather [effective] feedback.

Members from the three stakeholder groups either directly addressed the need for a feedback loop or implied it was absent. Results from the survey indicated that 23.2% of the instructors discussed the results with the students and 20.3% of the students agreed that feedback results are discussed. The greatest percentage for both the student and instructor group is in Division 1 (22.9%) and Division 4 (33.3%). Division 2, which has the greatest number of two-year programs, has a relatively low (10.5%) response on this question. It must be noted that neither the quality of the feedback nor the changes made as a result of sharing the feedback results were discussed.

Concerns surrounding the utility of the student feedback process are evident as the responses from the interviews are reviewed. Myths have an affect on the value many instructional staff place on the results they receive. The students' feel strongly that they provide accurate feedback, reflective of their true feelings about the course. Until more instructors overcome some of the myths associated with a student feedback on instruction process, particularly a formative process, then the results will continue to provide marginal or minimal utility.

Accountability

Accountability was a theme that emerged in much of the recent literature in an apparent response to public criticism about the value of education received for the amount of dollars invested. Evaluation of teaching is generally targeted as one of the very visible ways of addressing accountability in education. Instructor interviewees were requested to respond to a question that addressed accountability with particular reference to the key performance indicators that are to be established. These indicators will benchmark performance on various educational outcomes.

Key responses from each instructor are summarized in Table 8. All interviewees felt that some type of accountability measure was in order. Concern was expressed by Jake and Gerry that students are probably not the best measure of quality in instruction. They expressed that graduates, or alumni, are a better measure. "We can learn a lot about our programs by seeing who is employed once they finish with us." The remaining seven instructors felt that accountability was in order but how that was to be measured remained the question.

John pointed out that a standardized document needs to be developed so institutions are evaluated equitably. Developing a standard instrument would be an onerous task since it is difficult to account for the variability in various types of teaching situations. As was discussed

Table 8

Key Instructor Responses on Issue of Accountability

Instructor	Response
Dean	I think I like that...that is one thing that sets the Institute apart from the other institutions.
Deb	They [the government] are right. The system has to be accountable for what they produce. It is not good enough to sit back and say we did a good job when we are often afraid to look beyond our walls.
Kevin	I don't know how we are going to get the government to manage that. We need to be accountable.
Ken	Well, to me, I think it is probably time. I think we need that to get quality in instruction.
Giselle	I see this [student feedback] as part of it. You don't want to create a witch hunt.... we are accountable.
Gerry	I think we need to go to the graduating student because the value of an education and of instruction isn't noticed until after a year or so.
John	If they are going to use student feedback as one measure of key performance indicators, then I would hope that a standardized instrument would be used for all constituents.
Jake	I don't think students are a good measure of quality in instruction. I do think graduates in three to four years down the road are.

earlier, process issues will need to be addressed. Consistency in those would be as important as arriving at some standardized assessment document.

It appears that instructors conceptually accept the need to use some means to measure performance.

Examination of system outcomes is relatively new and not within the usual framework that instructors are accustomed to. These instructor interviewees were all very familiar with the intent of KPIs but were unsure of how that process could be managed within the Institute. One program supervisor, Glen, felt that the Institute had a distinct advantage since it has had some type of student evaluation process in place for a number of years. "We can only get better at this." As Don commented, "...if they [advanced education department] are serious about this, they have got to get to the grit of the situation instead of a warm and fuzzy document." Similar to the majority of instructors who were interviewed, the remaining six program supervisors agreed that accountability is something which is important. No clear recommendation was forthcoming from any of the interviewees on how this might be accomplished.

A conceptual model premised on CQI principles was utilized to compare the results from the data gathering with a continuous quality tool, the "Plan Do Check Act" (PDCA) cycle as described by Scholtes (1988). The purpose of the PDCA cycle is to use the data collected to analyse and refine whatever processes are being examined. This was particularly useful when looking at the process, utility, and accountability themes.

Putting the data into the context of a CQI framework allowed the researcher to understand the process and how it is presently managed, given the various stakeholders and the institution's environment. This conceptualization process was valuable in that it provided the framework for the interviewees' responses.

Culture

The importance of the Institution's culture emerged in several of the interviews and the interviewees' understanding of the culture appeared to frame their belief in the importance of the feedback process within the system. Each instructor interviewed acknowledged, without any prompting, that the students and what "...happens in the classroom" are key to the continued success of their programs. This strong connection between the instructor interviewees and their program areas made the researcher sense that each individual felt that his or her program was likened to an amoeba. The programs appear to be loosely coupled; they operate on many fronts, very independently irrespective of how the larger environment, the institution, operates.

Two program supervisors provided comments regarding the culture of the Institution in general and did not restrict their description to their program areas. When Glen described the process that the Institute went through to ensure that it was implementing a viable system, he stated that "...typically the culture of the Institute is one of mutual trust and respect and that is still the case." George presented a program perspective. "As the program supervisor, I can easily create a safe environment where staff would begin to share with one another the instructional process...the program supervisor needs to support their improving instruction...then it [the program] becomes a safe environment."

It was mentioned by one program supervisor, George, and one instructor, Giselle, that the instructors in their programs used to freely solicited feedback from students and learned from the results. They both felt that the present process was imposed and due to that, not highly valued and suggested it was not a process that was highly valued by the instructors.

The researcher anticipated that the program supervisors would provide more insight from an institutional perspective as to what the goals are with respect to student evaluation. What was found is that the system is self-perpetuating. The institution has a responsibility to ensure it is "seen as" monitoring and evaluating the student feedback system. There appeared to be high acceptance of the system even though there seems to be minimal return associated with the primary objectives of the program and the amount of resources required to maintain it.

The findings that relate to the Institute's culture were also analysed using Bolman and Deal's (1984) strategic thought frame model. Referring to the data, the organizational frame that best captured the essence of the student feedback on instruction program was the "symbolic" frame.

As institutions grow and change, so do the philosophies for managing the established processes within. New philosophies may have an effect on established processes but often a system is slow to reflect the reality of the changes. Within the context of this large institution, it is not difficult to understand that connectedness to values is supported by the culture within the program areas of the organization. A strong culture exists within the programs; the program areas defer to requirements of the Institution with respect to maintaining systems but not to internalizing the value the system.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the data analysis and focused specifically on the data gathered from interviews with instructors and supervisors. Descriptive statistics taken from the survey instruments were used to further clarify the data. Background information on the study participants was provided and the relationship of the data to the selected themes was presented.

The benefits of the student feedback on instruction process were identified, the perception as to whether this was a formative or summative evaluation process and the value of that process was examined. As well, the relationship among staff development, performance assessment, and student feedback on instruction were examined and how those related to the institution's culture were analyzed.

The next chapter addresses conclusions and recommendations of the study. The recommendations made address practice as well as further research.

CHAPTER 5

Summary of the Study, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter addresses conclusions and recommendations of the study. The recommendations made address practice as well as further research. To assist the reader in following the logic used, this chapter will begin with a summary of the study and problem statement on which it was based.

Overview

In May 1992, the Institute undertook a CQI initiative. This management philosophy was adopted to respond to the reality of reduced government funding and to the question of accountability from taxpayers. A basic premise of CQI is the examination and evaluation of all processes in an organization. CQI relies heavily on gathering data and assessing and interpreting those data to improve performance and ultimately provide efficiencies to the organization. CQI goals were identified that related to the Institute's customers, specifically its students, staff, and employers. At the request of the Institute's Board of Governors (November 1985) and under the direction of the Institute's Academic Council (April 1987), a formal process for collecting student feedback on instruction was implemented in May of 1988. There were two primary objectives; first, the feedback was to provide one source of information regarding an instructor's total performance (summative purpose) and second, to provide feedback to instructors for self-improvement (formative purpose). There was considerable concern expressed by the instructional staff regarding the first objective, particularly with respect to the students' ability to evaluate instructors on various aspects of their role. As well, instructors expressed concern regarding the inclusion of subjective questions in the instrument that they felt went beyond the students' perceptions of instructors' behavior.

The second objective noted in the original process (to provide formative feedback to the instructor for instructional improvement) is now the primary purpose of the present feedback on instruction process. In 1990, a third objective was added, specifically that the data collected would be used to provide longitudinal information on the quality of instruction by program and division within the Institute.

Presently the student feedback on instruction process as noted in the 1993/94 implementation guidelines, states that each instructor must complete a minimum of one SFIF for any course in each academic semester. A standard student feedback questionnaire is used to collect the data to ensure that there is consistent information by which to produce longitudinal statistics regarding quality of instruction. The instructor, in conjunction with the program supervisor, decide jointly which group of students to evaluate.

Within the 1993/94 guidelines there is a process in place for delivering the SFIF to the students. The implementation of the process should not vary from program to program. That part of the process is not currently monitored so variations in the implementation guidelines are possible. Instructors are not required to share the results of the feedback with either administrators nor students; some choose to do so. Due to the CQI movement within the Institute, some instructors are piloting, on their own, other methods to gather feedback on instruction in addition to the formal requirement of completing one SFIF per semester.

Statement of the Problem

After reviewing how the process was conceptualized, the stages of development, and the present process, the statement of the problem emerged. Namely: "Is the student feedback on instruction process, particularly the SFIF, at the Institute effective in assuring that instructional improvement goals are optimized?" Sub-questions to the problem statement arose from the research question and these were explored as part of the study. A decision was made to use the case study method to address the question and to undertake a qualitative analysis of the data. Permission to carry out the study was received, participants identified, and a profile of the Institute undertaken. The interview method was chosen as the primary data gathering technique; interviews were held with selected instructors and program supervisors. Surveys were chosen as the secondary method; instructors and students completed these.

During the data analysis, certain themes emerged: (a) purpose, (b) process, (c) utility, (d) accountability, and (e) culture. The relationship between the selected themes and the data collected during the interviews and from the surveys was examined.

Findings and Conclusions of the Study

Findings relating to four of the questions subsumed in the statement of the problem are presented as are the conclusions drawn from the findings.

Sub-question 1. What are the policies and processes by means of which the SFIF is prepared and administered to students?

Standardized student feedback forms are used to collect student responses. An opportunity exists to customize those forms for any course but, instructor-developed questions are not to replace the 14 standard questions contained on the form. All instructors are required to complete two student feedback on instruction forms each academic year.

The Institute has an established process in place for the collection, processing, and dissemination of student feedback data. Very specific guidelines are provided that relate to: (a) determining, in discussion with the program supervisor, which courses should be surveyed; (b) giving the students a preamble prior to completing the form; and (c) having an individual other than the instructor collect the completed forms and turn them in for processing.

There are two unstated assumptions that guide the decision as to when and how the feedback will be collected. These include: (a) the time during the semester that the form should be distributed, and (b) the time during the class when the feedback is solicited. The guidelines, both stated and unstated, are important to the process.

Quite contrary to the stated guidelines, the findings indicated that seldom does a program supervisor become involved in the selection of the course. The decision to choose which class to survey is left, in the majority of cases, to the instructor. From discussion with the program supervisors during the interview, it was suspected that they have minimal interest in deciding which class each of their instructors are to survey. It was concluded by the researcher that the supervisors' impact on the process is minimal. They only monitor the process by managing the administration of the paperwork thus fulfilling their primary responsibility. Supervisors become actively involved in those cases where feedback is requested by a student group. Some program supervisors do become involved in the administration of the process through scheduling when a student group can be surveyed. This is done primarily to avoid having the same students continually complete feedback forms.

An inherent problem in having the instructor choose the class to survey, is the probability that they will survey classes where strong rapport has developed between themselves and the students. From a human nature perspective, this makes intuitive sense. From a instructional improvement perspective, it can be expected that minimal valuable feedback would be provided to the instructors. Opportunities to examine their instructional effectiveness are minimized since the expectation is that the feedback results will be positive.

It must be remembered that the stated purpose of seeking feedback on instruction is to improve instruction. If instructors survey classes where they "sense" they will receive positive feedback, then one must question either their understanding of the student feedback process or their intentions. The practice of collecting feedback which will be positive indicates to the researcher that the instructor must believe that the feedback will be used for summative, not formative purposes. Otherwise instructors would choose any group of students to provide feedback. Established rapport with a student group would not be a criterion when deciding which group to survey.

Another stated guideline is the preamble information on completion of the form. There is inconsistency in the delivery of this information to students. The instructors interviewed indicated they did not read the preamble information to the students. It is suspected this can be attributed to a variety of factors including: (a) the students' assumed familiarity with completing SFIFs, (b) the amount of time available in the class to complete the form, (c) the comfort level of the instructor in delivering rote statements, (d) the amount of rapport with the student group and, (e) the attitude of the instructor regarding the purpose, the process, and the instrument.

Departures from the guidelines will affect the types of responses the students provide. Body language, tone of voice and perceived instructor interest will affect the process. Another factor which can affect the quality of student responses could be the dynamics between the instructor and the students; if the students feel intimidated by the instructor, they will not provide accurate feedback regardless of how well the preamble information is delivered. Clarification of what is expected from the students prior to their completing the forms, sets the tone for students in terms of the importance of the process. One positive note is that collection of the forms is almost entirely consistent with the stated guidelines.

As previously noted, there are unstated guidelines associated with the process. Distribution of the SFIF varies with respect to: (a) whether or not the chosen course is required or is an elective course, (b) the time of semester in which collection is carried out, (c) the time during the class in which it is distributed and, (d) which individual administers the SFIF. The research literature suggests that each of these will have an effect on the outcomes. A positive marginal effect on ratings will occur if: (a) the SFIF is delivered at the beginning of class and the instructor then remains in the class for the class period, and (b) an elective course is chosen as opposed to a required course. A negative marginal effect on ratings will occur if the instrument is delivered following the return of a difficult exam or assignment.

Inconsistencies in delivery of the SFIF and in the type of courses where feedback is solicited undermine the credibility of the results. Because of the lack of specific data to indicate whether or not the effect of these inconsistencies will either positively or negatively impact the results of the feedback, are unknown. It is sufficient to note that due to the many intervening variables in the delivery of the feedback forms, they will have an effect on the results.

It was clear from the literature that students will not provide an accurate assessment if: (a) they fear reprisal from the instructor related to their grade in the course and, (b) the instructor remains in class or the student knows the instructor will return to class after collection of the data. Whether instructors are aware of these factors or not, the results will not be as credible as they could be. Even if a small percentage of instructors in a program collected data under these circumstances, the students' perception of the entire process may become clouded. This may cause students to put little value on the process by not providing thoughtful, accurate responses. If instructors knowingly use these tactics with students to receive higher ratings, then their intentions must be questioned. As noted earlier, it is assumed that instructors believe the results will be used for summative purposes. Another explanation could also be that they have little confidence in their instructional ability. They may be instructors at risk. If this is the situation, these instructors could benefit from receiving accurate feedback. This would allow the instructors to seek professional development activities related to instructional improvement.

It is the researcher's assessment that instructors collect feedback because it is a requirement to do so, not because they perceive it as one way to improve their pedagogy. It is something that "has to be done" not something that is undertaken to improve their instruction. Unless a consistent, research-supported process is established with respect to the unstated guidelines for administering the form, then all that has been accomplished is that instructors have complied with the requirement to complete the minimum of two feedback forms. This compliance does not equate to the goal of instructional improvement. The process then, is symbolic.

Given the inconsistency of how the SFIF is administered, it cannot be stated that the longitudinal statistics that would be produced are any more credible for administrative purposes than are the individual feedback results to the instructors. Comparisons are being carried out and analyses undertaken of data that were not collected in a consistent manner. This negates the tertiary purpose of having data available to examine the overall quality of instruction at the Institute.

Sub-question 2. What are the policies and processes by means of which the SFIF data are: (a) made available to stakeholder groups, (b) acted upon for the improvement ofinstruction, and (c) acted upon for administrative purposes?

As was discerned in the findings, and as noted from the review of the implementation guidelines, instructors were not required to provide a summary of results to any of the stakeholders. Some choose to share the findings; however, that scenario does not appear to be the norm.

The research findings indicated that the student feedback results are used minimally for the improvement of instruction. This is consistent with the research literature. It is the researcher's contention that instructors are following a process they feel is driven by administrators and not driven by educators. This is in contrast to the survey results where every instructor indicated that he or she knew the results would not be used for administrative purposes. There appears to be a fundamental difference in the educators' beliefs versus administration's beliefs about the purpose of having a student feedback process. What is interesting is that the student feedback program appears, from an administration perspective, diluted to the point where the administrators have little impact on any aspect of the process.

The student feedback process now in place is an ideal opportunity for instructors to actively solicit feedback for ongoing instructional improvement. There is no risk, except perhaps, for an initial effect on self-esteem if negative unexpected feedback is received. All that is required of instructors is an ability to objectively examine the results of the feedback received and to act on that data to improve their instruction. The unanswered question is "why are the feedback results not used for their intended purpose?" Theoretically the present process is ideally designed to serve that purpose.

The research findings also indicated that the results of the feedback provided some value to the instructors when they were first used, but minimal utility is associated with their prolonged use other than as a motivator for those instructors who receive positive feedback. This was consistent with the research literature. If instructors received negative feedback, though, the feedback would not be considered a motivator; it would have the opposite effect.

As discussed earlier, it was clear from the survey data that instructors were aware the results would not be used for administrative purposes. This was not as clear to the students of whom ten percent believed there was a summative component to the process. Approximately 23% of instructors were not aware that there was a process in place to collect supervisor-initiated student feedback; 69% of students were not aware of this possibility. What was very obvious from these findings is that the purpose and process are not clear to the two main stakeholder groups.

It can only be speculated why instructors or program supervisors do not make students aware of the supervisor-initiated feedback instrument. Perhaps there is a belief by instructors and supervisors that students will misuse that process. Indicators from the findings would suggest otherwise. Students indicated they do provide accurate assessment data on the feedback form. It would seem unlikely that students would go out of their way to abuse the supervisor-initiated feedback process. Requests for it are screened carefully by program supervisors so the incidence of abuse would be minimal. It is incumbent upon the instructors and supervisors to make the students aware of the supervisor-initiated process since it is an extension of the student feedback on instruction process. It is unknown why instructors are unaware of this process; that was an unexpected finding.

Sub-question 3. What are the outcomes of the student feedback on instruction practices as perceived by the stakeholder groups?

The findings from the instructor group and student group indicate the outcomes are minimal with respect to the stated objectives of the student feedback on instruction program. As was stated above, minimal instructional improvement activities are undertaken based on the student feedback results. A feedback loop is absent, therefore, the process is not viewed as satisfactory to program supervisors since they are not included in the feedback process other than to ensure the SFIF have been administered. Some choose to discuss the statistical data showing divisional comparisons but that is not done globally at the Institute. As stated earlier, this is now an option.

The providers of the feedback are not apprised of what an instructor's intentions are with respect to the feedback they provided to the instructor. Often the feedback is collected too late in the semester for the present student group to benefit from changes made by the instructor as a result of their feedback. If instructors collect feedback after week 12, the data processing cannot be completed immediately, resulting in feedback which are usually returned after the semester is completed.

A general feature of a CQI program is continuous evaluation based on feedback received. What is now in place for student feedback does not conform to the CQI philosophy of continuous improvement. The absence of a feedback loop is totally in contrast with the concept of ongoing evaluation of the process. The researcher contends this is the case since the instructors do not understand the purpose of the feedback and are often "scrambling" to ensure it is carried out. The concern is with complying with the process, not benefitting from the results. The process is not viewed as satisfactory to program supervisors since they are not included in the feedback process other than to ensure the SFIFs have been administered and the statistical data showing divisional comparisons reviewed with staff. The latter is an option.

Sub-question 4. What are the perceived satisfaction levels of stakeholder groups with the policies, processes, outcomes, and with the SFIF as a tool?

Since the SFI process is a required one, the policies and processes are generally adhered to and questioned minimally by the stakeholder groups. It appears that many instructors subscribe to the myth that students are not qualified to make judgements about teaching competence. This factor alone would impede any instructional improvement activities being undertaken based on the results of the student feedback.

The data indicated that only 38% of the instructors felt that students provided accurate feedback. This is in contrast to 81% of the students who felt that the feedback they were providing was an accurate assessment of the instruction they were receiving. The researcher believes that the students, in general, are pleased with the instruction they receive. Providing accurate feedback to the instructors is the most obvious thing to do.

If students do not provide accurate feedback, that can be attributed to several intervening factors. The most common response that students gave for not providing accurate feedback was fear of recrimination on the part of the instructor. This was the most disturbing finding of the study. Since the present process is a formative one, it does not even attempt to address those concerns except when students approach a program supervisor. As was noted, 23% of the students are not even aware the supervisor-initiated process exists. For those who are aware, few act on it since only three of the program supervisors have ever used the supervisor-initiated student feedback form. Each supervisor only did this one time and all at the request of students.

The results do indicate that students feel they are quite capable of making clear judgements about instructional effectiveness. It is the researcher's belief, and one supported in the literature, that students are perhaps in the best position to make judgements on the delivery aspects of the instruction they receive. In some instances, they can also make strong arguments as to the instructor's knowledge of the content. As the recipients of the instruction, they are able to comment on how effectively instruction is delivered.

It is quite easy for instructors to subscribe to a myth when the myth which supports their belief that students do not have the expertise to fully judge instructional competence. It is suspected that the instructors who choose to believe in the myth, must feel that the feedback will be used for summative purposes. Instructors may also feel they are not accountable to the students for what they do in the classroom. The researcher strongly feels, and is in agreement with

Andrews (1985), that there may be an inherent inability on the part of some instructors to accept any form of feedback that could impact negatively on their self-esteem.

The validity of the instrument was not part of this study but the question was asked if the students and instructors believed collecting feedback via this mechanism was appropriate. As discussed in the data analysis, 60% of students and 52% of instructors indicated it was an appropriate method. The difference of opinion between the groups on this aspect of the process is minimal. Despite the support for the process by slightly over half of each group surveyed, the results are indicative of a system that is: (a) not serving its intended purpose, and (b) not reflective of the changes happening at the Institute associated with CQI.

Other questions were explored with the interviewees. They related to their perception of the appropriateness of a student feedback process within a CQI environment. How this process relates to the external political environment, where strong emphasis is placed on accountability as a major goal, was also examined.

In the case of the student feedback process at the Institute, data is collected, summarized, and returned to the instructor for review. It cannot be determined how extensively interpretation of the results is undertaken.

It can be stated that feedback is not shared with program supervisors with the intent of identifying areas for instructional improvement nor with the students to discuss the feedback they provided. These actions are not consistent with CQI. If this does occur, it is minimal and normally occurs with instructors who receive positive feedback. That group does not require student feedback for instructional improvement since they are constantly examining their pedagogy.

It is not known to what extent program supervisors are able to provide direction for instructional improvement or what level of expertise the program supervisor has to offer in this area. Presently educational consultants are not used at the Institute to assist in the interpretation of the results. The results are returned to the instructor for review. It cannot be determined how extensively instructor interpretation of the results is. There is no process in place to assist instructors in analysing their results; interpretation of results occurs on an individual basis. Every instructor interviewed indicated they mainly reviewed the written comments they received as opposed to interpreting the descriptive statistics provided in the results. In most instances, relatively few students provide comments, but if they do, they tend to comment on each question. Two instructors, Gerry and Jake, admitted they were not knowledgeable in interpreting what the results truly meant to them. The assumption is that instructors must automatically know how to interpret the results; the findings indicate that is not the case.

Absence of a feedback loop between the instructors and the stakeholders was noted; therefore, the process as it exists at this point in time is not consistent with the goals and philosophies of a CQI initiative. Relating the present process to the Scholtes' (1988) Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle, shows very clearly that only the first two steps in the cycle are undertaken at the Institute. There is minimal accountability in this process.

The research question. Is the student feedback on instruction process, particularly the SFIF, at the Institute effective in assuring that instructional improvement goals are optimized?

The student feedback process is a visible process which serves a symbolic purpose. It is viewed by instructors, program supervisors, and administration as a process to address the issue of accountability. Some interviewees felt that since the program's inception, it lacked the substance to provide the type of feedback that would assure that instructional improvement goals were met. These instructors stated that the Institute's academic professional association ensured that if a student feedback process were to be implemented at the Institute, it would not have any summative component.

The support for that change of direction from what was originally planned was driven by instructors who believed that students lacked the expertise and maturity to comment on instruction and also to avoid a "witch hunt" mentality. It was believed by administration if the process was not modified to accommodate those beliefs then the chances of having any type of student feedback program would not become a reality. The negotiated change in intent, which included the softening of the questions, plus having an entirely formative process, became the basic framework to design the system that is now in place.

Some interviewees intimated the often unspoken, but underlying belief, that the process is diluted to the point where it has minimal impact on instructors to examine their pedagogy. Based on the analyses of the findings, the researcher supports the contention that it is a diluted process that adds minimal value to the goal of improved instruction. The process does provide value for other purposes, particularly as a motivator to some instructors. It also added value for the students as it gave them a vehicle to express how they felt about the instruction they receive although the findings indicate that only minor, if any, changes are brought about by that feedback.

Recommendations for Practice

Subsumed in the original statement of the problem are the implications for practice. Specifically, what are the recommendations of the stakeholder groups for the improvement of the SFIF and related processes for the evaluation and improvement of instruction? As a result of the conclusions reached in this study, the following six recommendations are presented. Findings associated with the research question are integrated with the recommendations.

It is recommended that the student feedback on instruction policy should be re-examined to address issues of purpose, goals and objectives. The focus should reflect the current internal and external environments.

It was apparent from the conclusions reached that some stakeholder groups view the intent of the process quite differently. The present process is non-threatening to the instructor but does not universally assist them in achieving the goal of optimizing instructional improvement. The process does not provide a feedback loop to students or supervisors. Both these internal groups require that to meet their needs. It would also allow the instructors to focus on feedback that will assist them in improving their instructional delivery.

The internal and external environments have changed sufficiently since the inception of this program to warrant an examination of the process to better reflect the current reality. The present management philosophy at the Institute is one of continuous improvement so any student feedback process should address that. The external environment, specifically the provincial department of advanced education's demands that institutions become more accountable must be addressed as well. The present student feedback on instruction process does not address neither of these realities since the instructors are not accountable to the other stakeholders. The process needs to be examined in light of ongoing changes that have occurred over time.

The second recommendation emerging from this study is that a system of ongoing student feedback consistent with the PCDA cycle should be adopted by the instructional staff and used in all courses. Resources should be diverted from the present student feedback on instruction program and transferred to the Institute's professional development staff. They would utilize the additional resources to provide the necessary educational opportunities to instructional staff to adopt different methods of classroom feedback.

It became apparent from the research findings that students place high value on providing an accurate assessment of the instruction they are receiving. The instructional culture of the Institute is rapidly becoming one of cooperative learning. A process more consistent with that reality would be appropriate. The findings also indicated that instructors valued the concept of collecting feedback; where the present student feedback process fails is not having the instructors act on the results. As was noted, this can be attributed, in part, to the following factors: (a) the timing when feedback is received, (b) the belief on the part of some instructors that students lack the maturity, or are not capable of, providing accurate feedback and, (c) the absence of a feedback loop; virtually no accountability.

A process of ongoing classroom assessment modelled on CQI principles would be a process that:

1. stresses what is ultimately delivered to the student has only positive outcomes and which bodes well for all stakeholders;
2. structures the teaching environment to allow instructors to concentrate on the development of students which is the primary focus of the institution;
3. ensures a non-threatening environment for the development of instructional expertise which will improve relationships throughout programs and divisions;
4. focuses on ensuring stakeholders that quality actually exists which will allow the institution to be responsive to the public's demand for accountability.

The intention of this type of feedback program is to have some value added to the instructional process to the benefit of all stakeholders. Implementation of this type of process would require considerable commitment from the administration, divisional managers, program supervisors, instructors and students.

A third recommendation emerging from the conclusions reached is that a modified student feedback process should be implemented which requires that instructors collect student feedback data in the following circumstances: (a) all new instructors collect feedback from a minimum of two courses during each semester of their first year, (b) when an instructor is teaching a course for the first time or teaching a course that has been substantially redeveloped and, (c) once every three years if either of the first two scenarios do not apply.

The results of the feedback should be shared with the program supervisor as part of the instructors' overall performance assessment for the year it is collected. The program supervisor, in consultation with the instructor, should determine which group of students will be surveyed. An instructional designer who specializes in improvement techniques should be consulted to assist in the interpretation of the feedback results and recommend prescriptive measures to address areas of improvement. In addition, the present supervisor-initiated student feedback process should remain intact.

Frustration was expressed by the program supervisors and some instructors that the absence of any type of feedback loop did not allow the program supervisors to deal with ineffective instructors except in the instances when supervisor-initiated feedback was requested. Program supervisors must remain cognizant that anomalies may occur; what they need to identify are consistent patterns that develop over time with respect to an ineffective instructor. The present instrument could be used to collect this feedback with the stated purpose being summative as well as formative.

The fourth recommendation emerging in this study is that a program assessment instrument should be developed to determine satisfaction levels of the students and delivered in the last two weeks of the academic year. When implemented, it would provide: (a) feedback to the program supervisors for program and curriculum development, (b) assessment data for institutional research purposes, and (c) data for Key Performance Indicators. The instrument should be designed in keeping with the reporting data required by advanced education.

It was noted that due to the inconsistencies in the administration of the present program, the results are not as credible as intended. The Institute has years of experience in collecting feedback on instruction data. Given the recent requests to Academic Council that this process be revisited provides an opportunity to reevaluate the present system and integrate it with the requirements of the advanced education department. The implementation guidelines should reflect a consistent process for administering, collecting and processing these program feedback forms that meets the needs of the internal and external stakeholders.

A fifth recommendation is that after a modified feedback program is designed and adopted by all stakeholders, that a process for clear communication should be developed to increase students' and instructors' awareness and understanding of the student feedback on instruction process. It should include the following components: (a) the purpose of the feedback, (b) the students' responsibilities regarding feedback using a PCDA model as well as the modified student feedback process, (e) the process to request supervisor-initiated student feedback.

Communication problems exist with all aspects of the present process as was noted in the study findings. Inadequate communication provides unneeded frustration to the stakeholder groups, particularly the student groups who believe their feedback will make a difference in the instructional process. For any new process to be successful, all stakeholders need to "buy in." They will only be able to do so through understanding of the purpose of the process. That will only be accomplished through clear communication. There are many communication vehicles available for use such as: (a) the annual student handbook, (b) individual program orientation guides for new students, (c) the academic calendar, (d) the student newspaper, and (e) the instructor newsletter.

A sixth recommendation is that a review should be undertaken to determine ways to recognize and reward exemplary instruction. It was noted by some instructors that receiving excellent feedback acted as a motivator. Some program supervisors indicated that they only had the instructors' word that excellence existed in the classroom; they had no verifiable evidence except when an instructor shared student feedback. If there was not consistent sharing of feedback with instructors, it was assumed that the excellent feedback may have been an anomaly. What these comments point to is a need to have a mechanism in place where excellence in instruction is recognized and rewarded appropriately.

The desired intention of the research was to integrate the recommendations from the study findings into the instructional process at the Institute. This could ultimately result in improvements to the teaching environment which is what the intent of the present process is. Provision of a non-threatening process, as identified, would allow for the development of instructional expertise by focusing on methods to improve instruction which will potentially benefit all instructional stakeholders.

It is anticipated that the recommendations will broaden the framework which supports a role for CQI in the instructional process at the Institute. The intention is to have value added to the process, to make the process more comprehensive, and ultimately to implement recommendations and invite further analysis of the process in a continuous CQI cycle of planning, implementing, evaluating, adapting and improving. It is important that the process not be a symbolic one. It must be one that is undertaken with the intent of providing relevant, timely, and useful formative information for the instructors as well as useful summative information for accountability purposes.

Recommendations for Research

Throughout the process of collecting and analysing the data, several questions arose that the researcher would recommend to others interested in pursuing research on aspects of student feedback on instruction. Some suggested concepts for further research that arose during this study include:

1. Examination of the validity of student feedback instruments with respect to their intended purpose.
2. Examination of how ineffective instruction is identified and the process administrators follow to manage the situation.
3. Examination of the reasons why students do not provide accurate feedback on instruction.
4. Analysis of the effect a faculty association has on the development of a student feedback process.
5. Analysis of the effect a student association has on the development of a student feedback process.

6. Analysis of the type of expertise necessary to interpret the results of student feedback and to prescribe measures for instructional improvement.
7. Examination of why instructors subscribe to the research-related myths surrounding student feedback.
8. Analysis of what comprises instructional quality.
9. Examination of why instructors are unaware of policies and processes in an institution that directly impact them.

It is anticipated that pursuit of research on any of the above concepts will broaden the understanding of the role that student feedback on instruction has within the instructional process.

Summary

Prior to this study, it was suspected, and later confirmed, that the present process for soliciting student feedback is affected by a culture of change, specifically, change associated with the CQI initiative and also the external change associated with the emphasis on accountability in all aspects of post-secondary education.

The research question asked "if the student feedback on instruction process was effective in improving instructional quality?" Instructional quality, an elusive construct, appears to exist at the Institute; there is genuine respect on the part of the instructors interviewed for the students with undertones of concern that they are providing their students with excellent instruction.

However, the results of this study indicated that the present student feedback on instruction process contributes minimally to instructional improvement due to the many reasons discussed in this chapter.

It is worthy to note that this issue has been considered by the Institute's Academic Council repeatedly since the implementation of the present process in March of 1990. It is hoped that the recommendations outlined in this thesis will provide an analytical framework for their discussions and ultimate decision.

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Appendix A

PERMISSION TO COMPLETE RESEARCH

Dini Corbett-Lourenço

Graduate Student • Education Policy Studies
University of Alberta • Edmonton • Alberta • T6G 2G5
Phone: 471-8313 • Fax: 453-7925

January 23, 1995

Director
Research & Academic Development
The Institute of Technology

Dear xxxx::

Attached is my request to complete research at INST on the student evaluation on instruction process. As noted today, it is a timely topic given the discussions now taking place in Academic Council. I, of course, am quite enthused about the research. In the current environment of overall institution evaluation and the desire to ensure quality of program instruction, it is anticipated that the results of this research will be useful to the Institute. The intent of the research is to provide any information and/or recommendations that will ultimately improve and enhance the student feedback on instruction process.

I am requesting that the research, as identified, is endorsed by INST and that a letter or memo be provided to me from your office that states the same. I will ensure that your office has the opportunity to review any survey or questionnaire prior to its distribution and that you will be apprised of the ongoing progress. Upon completion of the research, a copy of analysis and recommendations will be submitted to the research and academic development department.

Attached is a tentative timeline for the completion of the research.

Sincerely,

Dini Corbett-Lourenço

Attachment

memo:

TO:

DATE: Jan. 26, 1994

FROM:

RE: **D. Corbett-Lourenco, Research Proposal**

Find attached a research proposal submitted by Dini Corbett-Lourenco. Dini proposes to study the [redacted] student feedback on instruction process, in partial fulfillment of requirements for a Masters degree from the University of Alberta.

Details of the proposed research study are well documented in the proposal submitted by Dini. Of particular note are the following points:

- the study will explore how CQI at [redacted] has impacted the instructional process;
- the study will examine whether the feedback on instruction process, and particularly the student feedback on instruction form, is effective in assisting instructional improvement;
- the research will involve a survey of students (a sample of 20 per instructional Division) and Instructors (a sample of 12 per Division);
- the research will also involve interviews with Program and Instructors (2 per Division).

Dini has agreed to keep me informed of the progress of her research, and to allow [redacted] to preview questionnaires before they are administered. She will also share the research findings and recommendations with the Institute.

Dini hopes to commence this study as soon as approval by [redacted] is granted, and hopes to complete her research by May 29, 1995 .

I recommend approval of this study.

Director, Research and Program Development

agree
Could be very
valuable.

Jan 26/95.

JAN 30 1995

Appendix B

REQUEST LETTER TO INSTRUCTOR PARTICIPANT FOR SELF AND STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN RESEARCH

Dini Corbett-Lourenço

Graduate Student • Education Policy Studies
University of Alberta • Edmonton • Alberta • T6G 2G5
Phone: 471-8313 • Fax: 453-7925

April 3, 1995

FIELD(Name} FIELD(Last Name}
FIELD(Address}

Dear FIELD(Name}:

SUBJECT: Research Project - Student Evaluation on Instruction at NAIT

Thank you so much for your willingness to assist me in my research project. Enclosed is all the material you need to expedite the process:

- one INSTRUCTOR SURVEY - RESEARCH (mauve)
- five STUDENT SURVEY - RESEARCH (yellow)
- one self-addressed return envelope

To ensure consistency, I am asking that you use the following procedure:

1) using a class list from any of your second-year groups, randomly select every third name on your list. If a student is absent, move to the next student and then continue with the random selection until you have five participants;

2) request that the students read the preamble to the survey and the instructions then complete the survey. This should take from 5 to 10 minutes. They are asked to then place the survey in the self-addressed return envelope;

3) you are requested to complete the Instructor Survey and place in the envelope. If you are interested in being interviewed to provide additional input in the research, please note that on the last page of the survey;

4) please put the completed surveys in the internal mail by Tuesday afternoon, April 11.

FIELD(Name}, thank you again for participating. The intent is to have the research completed by the end of June; copies of the results will be made available to your associate dean and to Academic Council and you are quite welcomed to review them at that time.

Sincerely,

Dini Corbett-Lourenço
Attachments as noted

Appendix C

PILOT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PILOT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - INSTRUCTORS

Note: **The intent of these questions to determine how Instructors perceive the student feedback on instruction process at INST.**

Policy: **requirement of INST**
Process: **how the policy is implemented**

PILOT

1. **What is your understanding of INST's policy on student feedback on instruction.**

2. **What is your understanding of how the SFIFs are to be administered?**

3. **When do you administer the SFIF to students?**

4. **Who administers the SFIF?**

5. **If you deliver the feedback forms, what instructions do you give the students?**

6. **If someone else delivers the SFIF, what instructions do you give that person for administering the forms?**

7. **How many classes do you survey for feedback on your instruction each semester?**

8. **Do you believe students are capable of providing valuable feedback on your instruction?**

   Probe: **If yes, what aspects? If no, why not?**

9. What do you do when you receive the results of the feedback?

Probe: Do you share the results with the program supervisor? Do you see them as a tool to improve instruction? Have you ever shared the results of the feedback with the student group who provided it? Have you ever sought any activity specifically related to what you learned from the student feedback.

10. Do you perceive the SFIF as valuable?

Probe: If yes, in what ways? If no, why?

11. Do you perceive the process as appropriate? If yes, in what ways? If no, why?

12. How do you view the process in a continuous quality improvement environment?

Probe: Where do you see it fit in the present environment?

13. Would you make any improvements to the process?

Probe: If yes, how would you improve it?

What would you do differently?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS.

Appendix D

STUDENT SURVEY

STUDENT SURVEY - RESEARCH

The intent of this research is to determine how effective the present process of evaluating instruction is at INST. The purpose of this survey is to obtain feedback on how second-year INST students perceive the effectiveness of the ***student feedback on instruction form.***

The answers given by you will be kept confidential. ***Please do not print or sign your name.*** *A summary of the results will be made available to your division supervisor in September, 1995.*

If you do not want to participate in this research, place a checkmark in the following box. ☐

Instructions

This survey should take 5 - 10 minutes to complete. If there are any questions you do not want to answer, cross the question out and go to the next question. **Use a pencil or pen to answer.**

For most questions, you will be asked to circle the number beside your response; some questions may require a written response.

On completion of the questionnaire, place it in the attached self-addressed envelope, seal it and place in the internal mail system.

Part A

This section will ask for some background questions which will help organize the responses from instructors in the four divisions.

1. **Please circle the number next to the academic division that applies to you.**

    1 Division 1
    2 Division 2
    3 Division 3
    4 Division 4

2. **Are you presently in your second year of your program?**

    1 Yes
    2 No

Please indicate how many years you have been instructing at INST? ______

3. To the best of your recollection, how many student feedback on instruction forms have you completed while a student at INST?

1 zero
2 one to three
3 four to six
4 more than six

Part B: This section applies specifically to the administration of instructor initiated *student feedback on instruction forms* (white forms).

4. Approximately what week in the semester are you generally asked to complete the *student feedback on instruction forms?* CIRCLE ONLY ONE NUMBER - do not circle in the shaded areas.

Week 1-4				Week 5 -8				Week 9-12				Week 13 ->			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16

5. Generally, when are you asked to complete the form?

1 At the beginning of class
2 During class, then class continues
3 At the end of class

6. Who normally distributes the forms?

1 Yourself, as course instructor
2 Student in course
3 Program Supervisor
4 Instructor, other than yourself as course instructor
5 Other individual

If you circled 5, who is this person? ______________________

7. In general, are instructions on how to complete the form given to you by the person who distributes it?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

8. On average, how much time does it take you to complete the form?

1 less than 5 minutes
2 6 - 10 minutes
3 11 - 15 minutes
4 over 15 minutes

9. Do you normally provide additional written comments on the form?

1 yes
2 no
3 sometimes

10. Who collects the forms after you complete it?

1 Course instructor
2 Student in course
3 Program supervisor
4 Instructor, other than course instructor
5 Other individual

11. To your knowledge, are the forms put in an envelope and sealed?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

Part C: This section applies specifically to your understanding of why students are asked to complete the instructor initiated *student feedback on instruction forms*.

12. To your knowledge, how were you first made aware that they would be asked to complete *student feedback on instruction forms?*

1 During program orientation for their first year
2 Prior to completion of their first feedback form
3 From other students
4 From the INST calendar
5 Other

If you circled 5, please indicate how or by whom: __________________

13. To your knowledge, are students able to request that *student feedback on instruction* be completed for a course?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Don't know

14. You are not required to sign the white *student feedback on instruction forms*. Would you complete the forms if you were required to sign them?

1 Yes
2 No

If you answered yes or no, please state why. ________________________
____

Part D: This section applies specifically to YOUR understanding of what the feedback is used for.

15. What do you feel is the primary purpose of completing the forms?

1 To provide general feedback on how students felt about the course
2 To provide feedback to me for course improvement
3 To provide feedback to me for instructional improvement
4 To provide feedback to my supervisor
5 Other

If you circled 5, please state other reason(s)

____

____

16. Do you believe that students are qualified to provide accurate feedback to an instructor on a course they are taking?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

If you circled number 2 or 3, please explain ____________________

____

17. When reviewing the feedback, do you normally provide feedback that reflects your true assessment of the course?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

18. If you circled 2 or 3 in the previous question, what intervening factors may affect your providing accurate feedback?

1 Students have too little time to complete the form
2 Students are completing too many feedback forms around the same time
3 Feel that students do not see any value in completing the forms
4 Feel that students are unsure of what the information is used for
5 Other

If you circled 5, please state any other reason. ______________________________
____

19. Have the results of the feedback ever been discussed by the course instructor with you and your class?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

If you circled number 1 or 3, on average, what percentage would represent the number of forms where you discussed the feedback with the class. CIRCLE ONLY ONE CHOICE.

10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%

20. Overall, do you feel that students completing the *student feedback on instruction form* is a good way to provide feedback on a course?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

If you circled 2 or 3, please explain ______________________________
____

21. Are there any additional comments you would like to make? Use the back of this page if necessary.

Thank you for your participation in this research project.

Appendix E

INSTRUCTOR SURVEY

INSTRUCTOR SURVEY - RESEARCH

The intent of this research is to determine how effective the present process of evaluating instruction is at INST. The purpose of this survey is to obtain feedback on how INST instructors perceive the effectiveness of the ***student feedback on instruction form.***

The answers given by you will be kept confidential. ***Please do not print or sign your name.*** *A summary of the results will be made available to your Associate Dean, Staff & Student Services, in September, 1995.*

If you do not want to participate in this research, place a checkmark in the following box. ☐

Instructions

This survey should take 5 - 10 minutes to complete. If there are any questions you do not want to answer, cross the question out and go to the next question. **Use a pencil or pen to answer.**

For most questions, you will be asked to circle the number beside your response; some questions may require a written response.

On completion of the questionnaire, place it in the attached self-addressed envelope, seal it and place in the internal mail system.

Part A

This section will ask for some background questions which will help organize the responses from instructors in the four divisions.

1. Please circle the number next to the academic division that applies to you.

1 Division 1
2 Division 2
3 Division 3
4 Division 4

2. Have you completed a minimum of three years of instruction at INST?

1 Yes
2 No

Please indicate how many years you have been instructing at INST? ______

3. To the best of your recollection, how many classes have you requested, or will request, *student feedback on instruction* from in the 1994-95 academic year.

1 zero
2 one to three
3 four to six
4 more than six

***Part B*:** This section applies specifically to the administration of instructor initiated *student feedback on instruction forms* (white forms).

4. Approximately what week in the semester do you generally ask students to complete the *student feedback on instruction forms?* CIRCLE ONLY ONE NUMBER - do not circle in the shaded areas.

Week 1-4				Week 5 -8				Week 9-12				Week 13 ->			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16

5. Generally, when do you ask them to complete the form?

1 At the beginning of class
2 During class, then class continues
3 At the end of class

6. Who normally distributes the forms?

1 Yourself, as course instructor
2 Student in course
3 Program Supervisor
4 Instructor, other than yourself as course instructor
5 Other individual

If you circled 5, who is this person? ____________________

7. In general, are instructions on how to complete the form given to the students by the person who distributes it?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

8. On average, how much time does it take the students to complete the form?

1 less than 5 minutes
2 6 - 10 minutes
3 11 - 15 minutes
4 over 15 minutes

9. Do students normally provide additional written comments on the form?

1 yes
2 no
3 sometimes

10. Who collects the forms after the students complete them?

1 Course instructor
2 Student in course
3 Program supervisor
4 Instructor, other than course instructor
5 Other individual

11. Are you normally in the class when the students complete the forms?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

Part C: This section applies specifically to your understanding of why students are asked to complete the instructor initiated *student feedback on instruction forms*.

12. To your knowledge, how are students first made aware that they would be asked to complete *student feedback on instruction forms?*

1 During program orientation for their first year
2 Prior to completion of their first feedback form
3 From other students
4 From the INST calendar
5 Other

If you circled 5, please indicate how or by whom: ________________

13. To your knowledge, are students able to request that *student feedback on instruction* be completed for a course?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Don't know

14. Students are not required to sign the white *student feedback on instruction forms*. Would you prefer that they be signed?

1 Yes
2 No

If you answered yes or no, please state why. ______________________
____

Part D: This section applies specifically to YOUR understanding of what the feedback is used for.

15. What do you feel is the primary purpose of completing the forms?

1 To provide general feedback on how students felt about the course
2 To provide feedback to me for course improvement
3 To provide feedback to me for instructional improvement
4 To provide feedback to my supervisor (program or assistant program head)
5 Other

If you circled 5, please state other reason(s)

16. Do you believe that students are qualified to provide accurate feedback to an instructor on a course they are taking?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

If you circled number 2 or 3, please explain

17. When reviewing the feedback, do you generally feel the feedback reflects a true assessment of the course?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

18. If you circled 2 or 3 in the previous question, what intervening factors may affect students providing accurate feedback?

1 Students have too little time to complete the form
2 Students are completing too many feedback forms around the same time
3 Feel that students do not see any value in completing the forms
4 Feel that students are unsure of what the information is used for
5 Other

If you circled 5, please state any other reason. ______________________________
____

19. Have the results of the feedback ever been discussed by you with class that provided the feedback?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

If you circled number 1 or 3, on average, what percentage would represent the number of forms where you discussed the feedback with the class. CIRCLE ONLY ONE CHOICE.

10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

20. Overall, do you feel that students completing the *student feedback on instruction form* is a good way to provide feedback on a course?

1 Yes
2 No
3 Sometimes

If you circled 2 or 3, please explain ______________________________
____

21. Would you make any improvements to the process?

1 Yes
2 No

If you answered yes, please note your suggestions.

____
____
____
____
____
____
____

22. Please provide any additional comments or suggestions on the student feedback on instruction process.

23. Please indicate whether you would be willing to be interviewed (approximately 30 minutes) to provide additional information for this research. ***The interview would be confidential.***

1 Yes
2 No

Name: ____________________ Work Phone: ______________

Thank you for your participation in this research project.

Appendix F

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - INSTRUCTORS

RESEARCH - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INSTRUCTORS

Note: The intent of these questions is to determine how INSTRUCTORS perceive the student feedback on instruction process at INST. The instructors interviewed would have already completed an instructor survey. Questions with an * would have their answers pulled from the survey.

Policy: requirement of INST
Process: how the policy is implemented

1. What is your understanding of INST'S policy on student feedback on instruction.

2. What is your understanding of how the SFIF are to be administered?

3. When do you administer the SFIF to students. *

4. Who administers the SFIF?*

5. If you deliver the feedback forms, what instructions do you give the students?*

   or

   If someone else delivers the SFIF, what instructions do you give that person for administering the forms?*

6. How many classes do you survey for feedback on your instruction each semester? *

7. **Do you believe students are capable of providing valuable feedback on your instruction?**

    Probe: If yes, what aspects?

    Probe: If no, why not?

8. **What do you do when you receive the results of the feedback?**

    Probe: Do you share results with the program supervisors?

    Probe: Do you see them as a tool to improve instruction?

    Probe: Have you ever shared the results of the feedback with the student group who provided it?

    Probe: Have you ever sought any professional development activity specifically related to what you learned from student feedback?

9. **Do you perceive the SFIF as valuable? If yes, In what ways? If no, why?**

10. **Do you perceive the process as appropriate? If yes, in what ways? In no, why?**

11. **How do you view the process in a continuous quality improvement environment? Where do you see it fit in the present environment?**

12. **Would you make any improvements to the process? If yes, how would you improve it?**

    Probe: What would you do differently?

13. **How do you feel the student feedback process at INST fits with the advanced education department's current emphasis on accountability.**

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Appendix G

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - PROGRAM SUPERVISORS

RESEARCH - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PROGRAM SUPERVISORS

Note: The intent of these questions is to determine how program supervisors perceive the student feedback on instruction process at the Institute.

1. **What is your understanding of the Institute' policy on student feedback on instruction?**

   Probe: What happens if an instructor does not complete the required number?

   Probe: When was the last time you discussed the policy/process with your staff?

   Probe: How are students in you program informed of the process?

2. **What is your understanding of how the results from the SFIF are primarily to be used.**

   Probe: Have you ever used them for any administrative purposes?

   Probe: Do you see them as a tool to improve instruction?

   Probe: Have you ever had to administer a program supervisory initiated evaluation?

3. **Do you perceive the SFIF as valuable? If yes, in what ways? If no, why?**

   Probe: Do you feel students are capable of evaluating instructors?

4. **Do you perceive the process as appropriate? If yes, in what ways? If no, why?**

   Probe: Are there other ways to get at the same information.

   Probe: How do you feel about the anonymity of responses?

5. **How do you view the process in a continuous quality improvement environment?**

6. **How do you fee the student feedback process at INST fits with the advanced education department's current emphasis on accountability.**

7. **What recommendations would you make for improvement of the process?**

   Probe: What would you do differently?

Appendix H

REQUEST LETTER TO INSTRUCTOR PARTICIPANTS

Dini Corbett-Lourenço

Graduate Student • Education Policy Studies
University of Alberta • Edmonton • Alberta • T6G 2G5
Phone: 471-8313 • Fax: 453-7925

April 24, 1995

FIELD(Name} FIELD(Last Name}
FIELD(Address}

Dear FIELD(Name}:

SUBJECT: Research Project - Student Feedback on Instruction at INST

I need your help! Currently I am working on a research project which examines the student feedback on instruction process at INST. This research proposal was approved by INST and is in partial fulfilment of the requirements to complete my M.Ed. degree. The research is timely in that this issue is now before INST's Academic Council.

The purpose of the research is to determine how effective the present process of student feedback on instruction is at INST. Students from each of the academic divisions have already been surveyed as have a small number of instructors. I require additional feedback from instructors in each of the divisions to ensure I am able to ***adequately reflect the views of our instructional staff***. Your name was chosen randomly and I do hope you will take the time to have your comments included in this research. In addition to the above surveys, I will be interviewing both instructors and program heads.

Your participation in this research would be greatly appreciated. The attached survey will take approximately ***5 - 10*** minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential. Any questions you have about the survey can be directed to me at the above number. ***Upon completion of the survey, please fold and return in the attached self-addressed envelope by Monday, May 1.*** A copy of the results will be available from your Associate Dean, Staff & Student Services, in September, 1995.

Thank you for taking time to assist me during a very hectic time of the year!

Sincerely,

Dini Corbett-Lourenço

Enclosures as noted

APPENDIX I

STUDENT FEEDBACK ON INSTRUCTION FORM

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The things that I liked about this class are:

The things that I would like to see changed or improved are:

I have the following suggestions; for example, concerning the textbook, weighting of marks etc.:

STUDENT FEEDBACK ON INSTRUCTION

LECTURE/CLASSROOM SETTING

is committed to providing the best possible education and career training. To do this, it is continually necessary to improve courses and the quality of instruction. The student feedback system has been established to allow the student to help in this process by providing:

- honest opinions, and
- constructive suggestions for improvement.

PROCEDURE:

1. Read each statement on page two of this questionnaire carefully and mark the appropriate response.
2. Write candid comments for each statement in the space provided on page three of the questionnaire.
3. Give the complete questionnaire to the person(s) designated to collect it. Completed questionnaires will be sealed in an envelope and sent to the Information Services Division for processing.

NOTE: You can be assured of complete confidentiality. The instructor will see only a printed summary of the results of this survey.

Thank you for your cooperation in providing feedback on instruction.

Response Scale:

SA = **Strongly Agree** - You strongly agree with the statement as it applies to this course or instructor.

A = **Agree** - You agree more than you disagree with the statement as it applies to this course or instructor.

D = **Disagree** - You disagree more than you agree with the statement as it applies to this course or instructor.

SD = **Strongly Disagree** - You strongly disagree with the statement as it applies to this course or instructor.

NA = **Not Applicable** - The statement does not apply to this course or instructor; you don't know a response or don't want to respond.

FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

STATEMENT	RESPONSE					COMMENTS
	SA	A	D	SD	NA	
1 The instructor clearly outlined what I was to learn in this course						
2 I understood from the start how I would be evaluated in this course						
3 The instructor seemed to be knowledgeable about this subject						
4 The instructor presented the material so that I could understand it (If you do not						
agree, please explain)						
5 The instructor spoke clearly						
6 The instructor treated me with respect						
7 The instructor used class time well						
8 The instructor helped me with difficult material (or work)						
9 The instructor was willing to arrange for extra help when I asked for it						
10 I think the marking was fair (If you do not agree, please explain)						
11 I would like to take another course from this instructor (If you						
do not agree, please explain)						
12 The instructor maintained control of the students in the classroom						
13 Exams and/or assignments were returned in time for results to be useful to me						
14 This questionnaire is a good way for me to say what I think about this course						
and the instruction						